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MARIA CHAPDELAINE

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MARIA CHAPDELAINE

A Romance of French Canada

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MARIA CHAPDELAINE

I

ITE, MISSA EST: depart, the mass is finished. The door of the church at Péribonka opened, and the men began to come out.

A moment earlier it had appeared desolate, this church, set by the side of the road, on the bank high above the Péribonka river,—its surface, frozen and covered with snow, all like a level plain. The snow lay deep on the road too, and on the fields, for the April sun was shedding through the grey clouds only sparse rays without heat, and the heavy spring rains had not yet come. This cold whiteness, the small size of the wooden church and of the few houses, likewise of wood, set at intervals along the road, the somber verge of the forest, so near that it seemed a menace,—all told of a hard life in an austere land.

But as soon as the men and boys passed through the church door, they assembled in groups upon the wide platform; and the cheery greetings, the jesting remarks flung from group to group, the continuous interchange of talk that was either serious or gay, bore ready witness, that these

people were of a race imbued with an irrepressible merriment, that nothing could restrain from laughter.

Cléophas Pesant, son of Thadée Pesant the blacksmith, was displaying with premature pride his light summer attire, an American suit with broad padded shoulders; but for this Sunday, which was yet cold, he had kept on his winter head-dress, a cap of black cloth, the ear flaps lined with rabbit skin, in place of the hard felt hat he would have liked to wear.

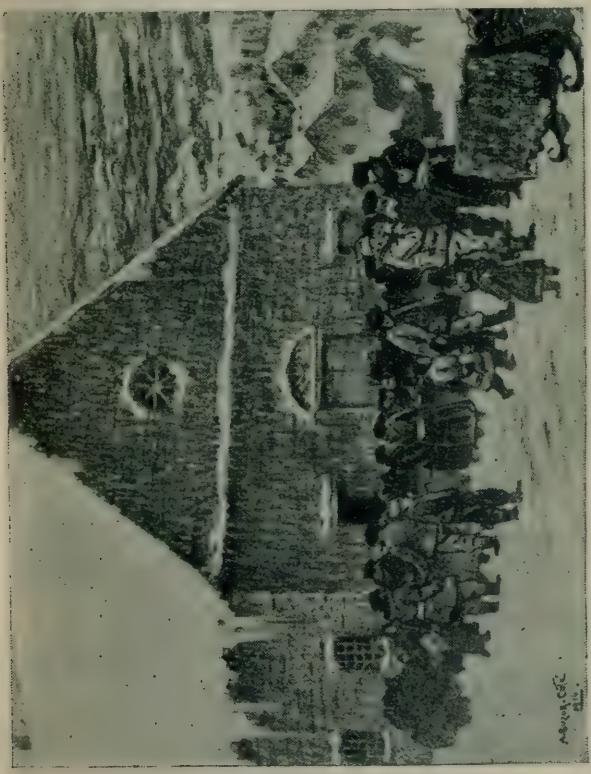
By his side Egide Simard and others, who like him had come a long journey by sleigh, were fastening their heavy fur coats as they went out of the church, and drew them close at the waist with red scarves. Some young fellows from the village, very handsome in their overcoats with collars of otter skin, were speaking with deference to old Nazaire Larouche, a tall grey man with large bony shoulders, who for the mass had made no change in his everyday garb: a short coat of brown homespun lined with sheepskin, patched breeches, and thick grey woolen socks in moose-hide moccasins.

"Well, Mr. Larouche, is all going right—across the water?"

"No worse, my lads, no worse."

Each one drew from his pocket his pipe and pig's bladder filled with tobacco leaves cut by hand, and began to smoke in much content, after the

abstinence of an hour and a-half. As they drew in the first whiffs, they talked of the weather, of the coming spring, of the condition of the ice on Lake



THE PÉRIBONKA CHURCH

St. John and the rivers, of their own affairs, and the news of the parish, like men who see each other

only once a week by reason of the long distance and bad roads.

"The lake is good yet," said Cléophas Pesant, "but the rivers are not safe any more. The ice melted this week on top of the sand bank opposite the island, where the spring holes were all winter."

Others began to speak of the prospective crops, before even the earth was in evidence. "I tell you," one old man made out, "it will be a bad year; the ground froze before the heavy snow."

Then the conversation slackened, and they turned towards the top step, where Napoléon Laliberté was making ready, according to his weekly custom, to announce the news of the parish.

He stood still and quiet for a few moments, awaiting silence, his hands deep down in the pockets of his heavy lynx coat, wrinkling his forehead, and half closing his sparkling eyes under the fur cap pulled down upon his head; and when silence fell, he proceeded to shout the news with all his strength in the voice of a driver encouraging his horses on a hill.

"The work on the wharf is about to begin. I have received money from the Government, and all those who wish to hire have only to come and see me before vespers. If you want this money to stay in the parish instead of going back to Quebec, come and speak to me, so that you may be engaged at once."

A few persons went towards him; others lacking interest were content to laugh. An envious

NAPOLÉON LALIBERTÉ

fellow asked in a low voice, "And who is to be fore-

man at three dollars a day? Our friend Laliberté, of course." But he spoke rather in jest than malice, and ended by joining in the laugh.

Still with hands in the pockets of his big coat, standing up straight and squaring his shoulders, on the top step, Napoléon Laliberté continued:

"A land surveyor from Roberval is coming to the parish next week. If there are any who want to have their lots surveyed before putting up the fences for the summer, let them say so."

This news was lost in the general indifference. Péribonka farmers do not care enough about rectifying the boundaries of their farms for the sake of gaining, or losing, a few square feet, so long as the most enterprising amongst them have yet two thirds of their concessions to clear, endless acres of woods or swamp to bring under control. He persisted:

"Two men are here, with money to buy furs. If you have any bearskins, or mink, or muskrat, or fox, go and see these men at the store not later than Wednesday, or better still, apply to François Paradis of Mistassini, who is with them. They have plenty of money, and pay cash for all skins of good quality." He finished the news, and came down the steps. A little man with a scrubby face took his turn.

"Who wants to buy a fine little pig of my pure breed?" he enquired, as he pointed with his finger to a shapeless mass moving about in a bag at his feet.

A burst of laughter was the reply. "We know them,—these pigs of Hormidas' pure breed, no

HORMIDAS BÉRUBÉ

bigger than rats, and quick as squirrels to jump the fences."

"Twenty-five cents," a young man offered in jest.

"Fifty cents."

"A dollar."

"Don't make a fool of yourself, Jean. Your wife won't let you pay a dollar for a pig like that." But Jean was obstinate:

"A dollar. I am not going back on my word."

Hormidas Bérubé made a grimace of contempt, and waited for other bids, but all he received was jests and laughter.

Meantime the women had begun in their turn to leave the church. Young or old, pretty or ugly, they were nearly all well clad in fur cloaks or coats of heavy cloth. For the Sunday mass, the sole holiday of their lives, they had discarded waists of coarse linen and skirts of homespun, and a stranger would be amazed at finding them almost stylish in the heart of this wild country, so essentially French, in a wilderness of woods and snow, dressed with as deft a touch, these peasants, as the majority of young people of the middle class in the provinces of France.

Cléophas Pesant was waiting for Louisa Tremblay who was by herself, and they went off together towards the houses, along the wooden sidewalk. Others amused themselves by exchanging pleasantries with the young girls as they passed, in that easy familiarity peculiar to the province of Quebec, and also because nearly all of them had grown up together.

Pite Gaudreau, his eyes turned toward the church door, announced, "Maria Chapdelaine has returned from her visit to St. Prime, and there is her father come to bring her home." There were several in the village to whom the Chapdelaines were almost complete strangers.

"Samuel Chapdelaine, who has a farm across the river above Honfleur in the woods?"

"That is the man."

"And the girl with him,—is that his daughter, Maria?"

"Yes. She has been on a visit for a month at St. Prime with her mother's people, the Bouchards, relations of Wilfrid Bouchard of St. Gédéon."

Interested looks were turned towards the top of the steps, and one of the young men yielded to Maria Chapdelaine the homage of rustic admiration.

"A fine, big girl," he said.

"Yes, indeed, a fine, big girl, and so handsome too. It is a pity she lives so far away in the woods. For how can the young fellows of the village go to see them on the other side of the river, above the falls, more than a dozen miles away, and the last miles with hardly any road?"

They looked at her with appraising smiles, all talking about her, this beautiful and almost inaccessible maiden; but when she came down the wooden steps with her father, and passed close to them, they were ill at ease, and drew back embarrassed, as if there were between her and them some-

thing much more than a river to be crossed and twelve miles of bad roads in the woods.

Little by little the groups formed in front of the church were dissolved. Some returned to their homes, having heard all the news; others before leaving went to pass an hour in one of the two meeting places of the village, the priest's house, or the store. Those who came from the back ranges, that line of concessions stretching along the border of the forest, untied their horses one by one from the row, and brought their sleighs to the foot of the church steps, so that the women and children might get in.

Samuel Chapdelaine and Maria had gone only a few steps on their way when a young man came up with them:

"Good day, Mr. Chapdelaine. Good day, Maria. This is luck, meeting you,—your place being far up the river, and I so seldom coming here."

His resolute eyes glanced from the one to the other. When he turned them away, it was only by an effort of thought and good manners, but soon his eyes returned; he looked them up and down, with a questioning gaze, clear, keen and filled with honest desire.

"François Paradis," exclaimed Mr. Chapdelaine; "this is good luck indeed, François; it is a long time since I have seen you. And so your father is dead. Have you kept the farm?"

The young man did not reply; he looked intently at Maria with an ingenuous smile, as if he thought it was her turn to speak.

"Surely you remember François Paradis of Mistassini, Maria? He has hardly changed at all."

"Nor you either, Mr. Chapdelaine. Your daughter—that is different, she has changed; but I would know her at once."

They had spent the day before at St. Michel de Mistassini in the full light of the afternoon; but the sight of this young man, the sound of her name called up in Maria's mind a remembrance that was really more distinct and more vivid than the scenes of yesterday: the great wooden bridge, covered in and painted red, something like a Noah's ark, and of an amazing length; the two banks that arose steeply to the high hills, the old monastery crouching between the river and the rising ground, the water that foamed, and leaped, and hurled itself from on high adown the great falls, as down a giant stairway.

"François Paradis.—Certainly, father. Of course I remember François Paradis." Now satisfied, he answered the questions of a moment ago.

"No, Mr. Chapdelaine, I have not kept the farm. When my good father died, I sold everything, and since then I have mostly worked in the woods, hunted, or even traded with the Indians about the big lake at Mistassini or on the Rivière-aux-Foins. I spent two years in the Labrador as well."

His gaze wandered once more from Samuel Chapdelaine to Maria, but she modestly turned away her eyes.

"Are you going up home to-day?" he asked.

"Yes, right after dinner."

"I am glad to have seen you, because I am going to pass near your place on my way up the river in two or three weeks, when the ice will have come down. I am here with some Belgians who want to buy furs from the Indians; we will begin the ascent with the first open water, and if we camp near your farm above the falls, I shall come and spend an evening."

"Very good, François; we shall expect you."

The alders formed a long, thick screen the whole length of the Péribonka river, but their denuded branches did not conceal the abrupt descent of the bank, nor the wide plain of frozen water, nor the somber verge of the woods that pressed close to the opposite shore, allowing between the leafy solitude of the great standing trees, and the naked solitude of the frozen water, only space sufficient for a few narrow fields, often enough still strewn with stumps, so narrow indeed that they appeared to be confined in the embrace of a savage land.

For Maria Chapdelaine, who looked upon all these things with a certain nonchalance, there was nothing in them to make her either lonely or afraid. She had always beheld only such scenes from October to May, or even others that were still

more gloomy and depressing, farther removed from the humanity of houses and farms; indeed all her surroundings this morning seemed suddenly mitigated, illumined by a consolation, by something precious and of good omen, which she was now content to await: the springtime that was coming, perhaps,—or indeed the imminence of another reason for joy, whose name she was not allowed to foretell.

Samuel Chapdelaine and Maria went to dinner with their relative Azalma Larouche, with whom they had spent the night. Besides themselves there was only their hostess, who for several years had been a widow, and old Nazaire Larouche her brother-in-law.

Azalma was a tall flat-chested woman with the undefined features of a child, who talked fast and incessantly, as she was preparing the meal in the kitchen. At times she would stop and sit down in front of her visitors, not so much for the sake of resting herself as to give especial emphasis to what she was about to say; but very soon the seasoning of a dish or the arrangement of the plates on the table would demand her attention, and her monologue would be continued to the sound of rattling crockery and pans.

The pea soup was soon ready, and served. As they eat, the two men spoke of the progress of their farms and the state of the spring ice.

"You ought to be safe in crossing this evening," said Nazaire Larouche, "but it will be a close thing, and I suppose you will be about the last. The current is strong below the falls, and it has been raining for three days."

"Every one says the ice will last a long time yet," his sister-in-law remarked. "You had better sleep here again to-night, the both of you, and after supper the young people from the village will come to spend the evening. It is only right that Maria should have a little more pleasure before you carry her off up there into the woods."

"She has had enough pleasure at St. Prime with parties almost every evening, singing songs, and playing games. We are much obliged, but I am going to harness right after dinner, so that we may reach home in good time."

Old Nazaire Larouche spoke of the morning sermon; he had found it convincing and good; then after a pause he asked abruptly:

"Have you baked?"

His sister-in-law looked at him for a moment in surprise, and then understood that he was asking for more bread. A little later he enquired again:

"Your pump,—is it working well?"

This meant that there was no water on the table. Azalma got up to go for it, and behind her back the old man gave Maria a facetious wink. "I speak to her in parables," he chuckled, "it is more polite."

The plank walls of the house were covered with old newspapers, adorned with calendars distributed

by manufacturers of agricultural machinery or by grain merchants, and with pictures of a religious nature; one in crude colours, and almost without perspective, of the basilica at Ste. Anne de Beaupré; a portrait of Pope Pius X; a chromo in which the Virgin Mary with a wan smile exposed to view her bleeding heart in a golden halo.

"This is a better house than ours," Maria was thinking.

Nazaire Larouche continued making use of his dark sayings,—"your pig is pretty lean?" — or again, "you like maple sugar? I am very fond of it, myself."

Azalma served him with a second slice of pork, or brought the loaf of maple sugar from the cupboard. When she became offended by these strange manners, and bade him help himself as at other times, he soothed her with pleasant apologies:

"You are right, quite right. I will not do it again; but you are accustomed to the sound of laughter, Azalma; and when you have at table young fellows like me, you must be prepared for fun."

Maria smiled as she thought of the resemblance between him and her father. They were both tall and big, grey haired, with faces the colour of leather, and in their sparkling eyes the same eternal youth which in many cases gives to the men of Quebec their eternal ingenuousness.

They left almost as soon as the meal was over. The snow, melted on the surface by the early rains, and freezing again in the cold nights, was wonderfully glib, and sped backwards beneath the runners of the sleigh. Behind them the high blue hills that set bounds to the horizon across the lake St. John gradually disappeared, as they ascended the long curving river.

As they went by the church Samuel Chapdelaine became pensive, and said, "It is beautiful, the mass; I am often sorry that we are so far away from the churches. Perhaps it is not being able to perform our religious duties every Sunday that keeps us from being as fortunate as others."

"It is not our fault," Maria sighed. "We are so far away."

Her father again shook his head regretfully. The splendid spectacle of public worship, the Latin hymns, the lighted candles, the solemnity of the Sunday mass always filled him with a great fervour. A little farther on he began to sing:

J'irai la voir un jour,
M'asseoir près de son trône,
Recevoir ma couronne,
Et régner à mon tour.

His voice was strong and true; he sang with full volume and deep fervour; but soon his eyes closed, and gradually his chin sank upon his breast. Driving never failed to put him to sleep, and the horse, suspecting the habitual sleepiness of his

master, slowed down and went at a walk.

"Get up there, Charles-Eugène."

He roused himself quickly, and put out his hand to the whip. Charles-Eugène, resigned, began to trot. Several generations ago a Chapdelaine had cherished a long grudge against a neighbour who bore these names, and he promptly gave them to an old horse, worn out and slightly lame, so that he might have the daily satisfaction of shouting in a loud voice, as he passed in front of his enemy's house:

"Charles-Eugène, you rascal, you ugly, ill-mannered beast! Get up, Charles-Eugène!" A hundred years ago the feud was finished and forgotten, but the Chapdelaines continued to call their horse Charles-Eugène.

Anew the hymn was heard, deep toned and filled with religious fervour:

> Au ciel, au ciel, au ciel,
> J'irai la voir un jour.

Then once more sleep was the stronger; his voice failed, and Maria took the reins that had slipped from her father's hand.

The icy road followed the icy river. On the other side the houses were spaced pitifully far apart, each one surrounded by an area of cleared land. At the back of this cleared land, and on both sides, were the woods coming down almost to the river's bank; a dark green background of cypress against which here and there a few detached birch

trunks showed white and bare, like the columns of a ruined temple.

On the other side of the road the strip of cleared land was wider and continuous; the houses set closer together seemed to extend the village into an outpost; but ever beyond the bare fields appeared the border of the woods, and followed like a shadow, an endless and gloomy frieze between the cold whiteness of the ground and the grey sky.

"Charles-Eugène, get up a little." Chapdelaine awoke, and put out his hand to the whip,—the usual whimsical threat; but when the horse slowed down again after a few more lively paces, he was asleep again, his hands open on his knees and showing the glossy palms of his horse-hide mitts, his chin resting on the thick fur of his coat.

At the end of two miles the road scaled a steep hill and entered the real woods. The houses spaced across the plain from the village suddenly vanished, and the prospect was nothing more than a city of naked trunks arising from the white ground. Even the eternal deep green of fir, spruce, and pine was less in evidence; the few young living trees were lost in the midst of countless skeletons lying on the ground, but reclothed with snow, or other skeletons still erect but stripped and blackened by fire. Twenty years ago great fires had passed that way, and the new growth barely managed to peep between the dead trunks and the charred logs lying on the ground. Hills came next

and the road ran from one to the other, falling and rising, little more in profile than the outline of an ocean swell.

Maria Chapdelaine drew her cloak around her, hid her hands under the heavy sleigh robe of grey goat skin; she half closed her eyes. There was nothing to look at in this place. In the villages new houses and barns might be built from time to time, or might even be abandoned and fallen into ruin; but in the woods life was so leisurely an affair that more than human patience was required to await and observe any change.

The horse was the only being on the road that remained fully conscious. The sleigh glided over the hard snow, grazing the stumps that stood up on either hand alongside the track. Charles-Eugène followed neatly all the detours, went down the short hills at a fast trot, and climbed the opposite slope at a slow pace,—an experienced beast, quite able to bring his masters to the door-step of their own house, without being bothered by a word or the touch of a rein.

A few miles more, and the woods opened again to disclose the river. The road ran down the last hill of the high ground to descend almost to the level of the ice. Along a mile of the rising bank three houses were set at intervals; but they were even more primitive than the houses in the village, and behind them barely any cleared land was to be seen, or sign of summer husbandry, as if they

had been built there merely as evidence of the existence of man.

Charles-Eugène turned sharply to the right, stiffened his fore legs to hold back on the slope, and stopped short at the edge of the ice. Samuel Chapdelaine opened his eyes.

"Here, father," said Maria, "take the reins." He took the reins, but before starting the horse he

CHARLES-EUGÈNE

paused a moment, and examined the surface of the frozen river.

"A little water has come on the ice, and the snow has melted," he said; "but all the same we should be safe in crossing. Get on, Charles-Eugène."

The horse sniffed at the white surface before adventuring, then he went straight at it. The regular winter road had disappeared; the young balsams set at intervals to mark the way had

fallen, and lay in the half melted snow; as they passed near the island the ice cracked twice but did not give way. Charles-Eugène trotted merrily toward the house of Charles Lindsay, which could be seen on the opposite side. But when the sleigh reached the middle of the current below the high falls, the horse had to slow down in the shallow pool of water that overflowed the ice. Slowly they

THE LAST CROSSING

drew near to the bank; there was not more than thirty feet to clear, when the ice again began to crack, and heaved under the horse's hoofs.

Chapdelaine rose to his feet, quite wide awake this time, his eyes bright and resolute beneath his fur cap. "Charles-Eugène. Get up. Get up there!" he roared in his mighty voice.

The old horse planted the caulks of his shoes

into the half melted snow, and went to the shore by leaps, and mighty strokes upon the collar. Just as they took the land, a piece of ice upset beneath the runners of the sleigh, and went to the bottom, leaving in its place a hole of open water. Samuel Chapdelaine turned about.

"We will be the last to cross, this year," he said; and he let his horse breathe a little before climbing the bank.

Very soon they left the highway for a road that plunged into the woods. It was little more than a rough track, obstructed with roots, which described slight convenient curves to avoid the rocks and stumps. It climbed a slope, wound over a plateau in the midst of burnt woods, disclosing at times, in descending an abrupt slope, a swift view of the massive rocks in the rapids, and a view of the opposite side which became more lofty and precipitous above the falls; then it entered once more into the desolation of fallen trees and blackened stumps.

Hillocks of rock, once they were rounded, seemed to close in behind them; the burnt lands gave place to a somber mass of spruce and fir; the mountains of the river Alec showed twice or thrice in the distance; and soon the travellers discovered all at once a space of cleared land, smoke ascending, and the barking of a dog.

"They will be glad to see you again, Maria," said her father; "they are all lonesome for you."

II

It was supper-time, and yet Maria had not finished answering questions, relating without omission the incidents of her journey, giving the news of St. Prime and Péribonka, and all the other news she had gathered on the way.

Tit' Bé, sitting on a chair in front of his sister, smoked pipe after pipe without removing his eyes from her for a single moment, fearing to miss any important disclosure she might hitherto have suppressed. The little Alma Rose stood beside her, an arm around her neck; Télesphore too was listening, as he mended with string the harness for his dog. The mother Chapdelaine stirred the fire in the big iron stove; went and came; brought from the cupboard the plates, spoons, knives, and forks; the bread, the pitcher of milk; and tipped over a glass jug the big jar of molasses. She often interrupted Maria to ask a question, or listened for a moment in thought, with hands upon her hips, seeing again by an effort of memory the villages whose names she was now hearing.

"So the church is finished; a fine stone church with pictures on the walls, and coloured glass in

the windows. How beautiful it must be! Johnny Bouchard built a new barn last summer; and it is one of the little Perrons, daughter of Abélard from St. Jerome, that keeps the school. Eight years since I have been at St. Prime,—to think of it! That is a fine parish. It would have suited me well: good level land as far as the eye can reach, no rocks or woods, nothing but regular fields with good straight fences, rich soil, and the railroad distant not more than two hours drive. It may be wrong to say so, but all my life I shall be sorry that your father liked to move so often, and push further and ever further into the woods, instead of taking a farm in one of the old parishes."

From the small square window she looked despondently upon the few bare fields behind the house, upon the wooden barn of rough, ill-joined boards, and farther off the stretch of land, still strewn with stumps, that extended to the edge of the forest, and gave any promise of recompense in hay or grain only after a long and patient endurance.

"Look," said Alma Rose; "there is Chien coming to be petted too."

Maria looked down at the dog that came and laid upon her knee his long head with pathetic eyes, and she caressed him with affectionate words.

"He was lonesome for you, just like ourselves," Alma Rose said again. "Every morning he went

to look in your bed, to see if you had not come home.

She called him: "Come, Chien; come so I may pet you too." Chien went from one to the other, docile, half closing his eyes at every stroke. Maria looked around her, to see any change, however unlikely, that might have been made in her absence.

The big three-decked stove occupied the middle of the house; a sheet-iron pipe went out from it, which after a few vertical feet turned at a right angle, and extended in a level line to the outside, so that none of the precious heat should be lost. In a corner was the great wooden cupboard; close by was the table, the bench against the wall, and on the other side of the door the sink and the pump. A partition extending from the opposite wall seemed as if it were about to divide that part of the house into two rooms, but stopped short before reaching the stove, and no other partition joined it, in such a way that these two compartments of the single room, each enclosed on three sides, looked like a stage setting, one of those conventional arrangements which one is willing to believe represents two complete apartments, although the spectators can look into both at the same time.

The father and mother had their bed in one of these compartments; Maria and Alma Rose in the other. In one corner a steep stairway led through a trap-door into the loft, where the boys

slept in summer; in winter they brought their bed down below, and slept in the warmth of the stove with the rest.

Hanging on the wall were some illustrated calendars from merchants in Roberval or Chicoutimi, an image of the infant Jesus in the arms of his mother; a Jesus with large blue eyes in a rosy face, holding out chubby hands; another picture portrayed an unnamed, holy woman gazing heavenward with a look of ecstasy; and there was the first page of the Christmas number of a Quebec newspaper, filled with stars as large as moons, and angels flying with folded wings.

"Have you been a good girl while I was away, Alma Rose?"

It was her mother that answered: "Alma Rose has not been too bad; but Télesphore gave me a lot of trouble. It is not that he does very much that is wrong; but what he says! You would think that child had not all his wits."

Télesphore was busy with the dog's harness, and pretended not to hear. The vagaries of the young Télesphore formed the only domestic tragedy the household knew. To explain him to herself, and make him understand the nature of his perpetual misdeeds, his mother had fashioned a kind of complicated polytheism, a supernatural world in which spirits, evil or benign, compelled him first to err, and then to repent. The child in the end looked upon himself as nothing more than

a jousting-field where spirits, certainly malign, and angels good but guileless, waged a continuous and unequal contest.

Before the empty jam pot he would gravely murmur: "It is the demon of greed that tempted me."

Returning from an escapade with soiled and torn clothing, he would explain without waiting to be scolded: "It was the demon of disobedience made me do that. That is the one;" and in the same breath he would affirm his indignation and his good resolves.

"But he must not come back, must he, mother? He must not come back,—this wicked spirit. I shall take father's gun, and kill him."

"It is not with a gun you kill evil spirits," his mother assured him. "When you feel the temptation coming, take your beads and say your prayers." Télesphore did not venture to reply, but shook his head in doubt. The gun seemed to him the easiest and surest weapon, and he longed for a heroic conflict, a lengthy slaughter from which he would emerge perfect and pure, delivered for all time from the wiles of the evil One.

Samuel Chapdelaine came into the house, and supper was served. The sign of the cross about the table; lips moving in silent thanksgiving, Télesphore and Alma Rose repeating theirs aloud; then more signs of the cross; noise of chairs and of the bench being drawn in; spoons rattling on the

plates,—it seemed to Maria after her absence that she was observing these movements and sounds for the first time in her life; that they were different from the sounds and movements in other places, invested with a fragrance and solemnity solely from being performed in this isolated house in the woods.

They finished supper, when the sound of steps was heard outside. Chien pricked up his ears, but did not growl.

"An evening visitor," said the mother. "It is Eutrope Gagnon coming to see us."

That was an easy guess, since Eutrope Gagnon was their only neighbour. The year before, he had taken a concession two miles away, with his brother who was up in the shanties for the winter, leaving him alone in the rough log cabin they had built. He appeared on the door-step, his lantern in his hand.

"Good night to all," he said, as he took off his woolen cap. "The night was clear, and there is yet a crust on the snow; so since the walking is good, I thought I would come and see if you had come home." Although he came on Maria's account, as every one knew, it was to her father alone he addressed his remarks, partly from shyness and partly out of respect for the etiquette of the country. He took the chair that was offered to him.

"The weather is mild; it is as much as ever if it is not going to be soft. You can see that the spring rains are coming."

EUTROPE GAGNON

So began one of those peasant conversations which are like an endless song full of repetitions, each person approving the words that have just been uttered, and adding other words that say the same thing. And the subject quite naturally was the eternal Canadian lament; complaint without protest against the crushing burden of the long winter.

"The cattle ~~are~~ have been in the stable since the end of October, and there is hardly anything left in the barn," the mother Chapdelaine said. "Except spring comes very soon, I do not know what we are going to do."

"Three weeks more at the least before we can put them out of doors."

"A horse, three cows, a pig, and the sheep, without counting the hens—that's what eats," Tit' Bé observed with an air of great wisdom.

He now smoked and talked with the men, in virtue of his fourteen years, his big shoulders, and his knowledge of farming. Eight years earlier he had begun to care for the animals, and every day brought into the house on his little sled the needful supply of wood. A little later he learned to shout behind the lean-rumped cows "Heulle! Heulle!" and "Hue! Dia! and Harrie!" behind the horses at the plough, to use a hay-fork, and build a picket fence. For two years now he wielded in turn the ax and the scythe by his father's side; he drove

the big wood sled on the hard snow, planted and reaped without advice, so that no one any longer disputed the right to express his opinion freely, and to smoke incessantly the strong tobacco leaf. He had still the beardless face of a child with immature features, candid eyes; and a stranger would probably be amazed to hear him speak with the measured slowness of an old man full of experience, and to see him eternally smoking his wooden pipe; but in Quebec the boys are treated like men as soon as they share in men's work; and for their precocious use of tobacco they can always give as a reason, that it is a protection against those dreadful harassing insects of the summer, mosquitoes, gnats, and black flies.

"How pleasant it must be to live in a country where there is hardly any winter, where the land cherishes man and beast. Here it is the men who cherish the animals and the earth by dint of toil. If we had not Esdras and Da' Bé in the woods, earning good wages, what would we do?"

"Yet the land is good in these parts," Eutrope Gagnon made out.

"The land is good, but you must contend with the woods to get it; and to live you must save, and toil from morning to night, and do everything alone, since the other houses are so far away."

The mother Chapdelaine sighed, and said nothing. She was always thinking with regret of the old parishes, where the land had been

cleared and cultivated for a long time, and the houses close together, as if it were a lost paradise. Her husband clenched his fists, and obstinately shook his head.

"Wait a few months only. When the boys come back from the woods, we are going to work, the two of them, Tit' Bé and myself; and we will clear the land. With four good men at the ax, and not afraid of work, it goes fast, even in the hard wood. In two years from this we will have grain and fodder to support a lot of cattle. I tell you we are going to clear the land."

To clear the land: that is the great expression of the country, which describes all that lies of hard toil between the poverty of the wild woods and the final fertility of ploughed and sowed fields. Samuel Chapdelaine spoke of it with a flame of enthusiasm and elation in his eyes.

It was a passion with him: the passion of a man made for clearing rather than for tilling the land. Five times already since his young days he had taken a concession, built a house, a stable, and a barn, and out of the sheer woods fashioned a prosperous farm; and five times he sold this farm, to go and begin all over again farther away to the north, quickly discouraged, losing all interest and all ardour once the first heavy labour was at an end, as soon as many neighbours arrived, and the country began to be settled and opened up. Some understood him; others thought him

more enterprising than prudent, and they kept saying that if he had known how to stay in one place, he and his would now be at their ease.

At their ease . . . O dread God of the Scriptures, whom all in the country of Quebec worship without guile and without reserve! Thou who didst condemn Thy creatures to gain their bread in the sweat of their face, dost Thou permit the grave frown on Thy forehead to relax for a moment, as Thou hearest that some of those creatures are set free, and finally at their ease?

At their ease . . . One must have wrought hard from dawn to night with back and limbs to understand what that means; and the children of the soil are they who understand it best of all. It means the burden cast down, the heavy burden of labour and fear. It means leave to rest which is, even if unused, a continual mercy. For the old it means a little pride approved by all, the tardy discovery of comforts hitherto unknown, an hour of idleness, a distant journey, a feast, or a purchase made without anxious calculation, the hundred complaisancies of an easy life.

The human heart is so contrived that most of those who have paid the ransom, and so have achieved liberty — ease — are in the process of achievement fashioned into a form incapable of enjoying it, and persist in their hard way of life even unto death; and it is to those others, ill-endowed or unfortunate, who have not been able

to redeem themselves, and must remain slaves, that ease presents itself with all the glory of a state that is unattainable.

Possibly the Chapdelaines were thinking of this, each in his own way; the father with the invincible optimism of a man who knows himself strong, and believes himself wise; the mother with a regret to which she is resigned; and the others, the young, more vaguely and without bitterness on account of the long and assuredly happy life they saw before them.

Maria at times looked with stealth at Eutrope Gagnon, and as quickly turned her eyes away, for every time she caught his eyes fixed upon her, and filled with humble admiration. For a year, she had, without dislike, been accustomed to his frequent visits, and every Sunday evening to see in the family circle his brown face radiating good humour and patience; but that short absence of a month seemed to have changed everything; and in coming back to the fireside she brought an indistinct idea that she was beginning a stage in her life in which he would have no part.

When the usual subjects of conversation were exhausted, they played cards: "quatre-sept" and "boeuf;" then Eutrope looked at his big silver watch, and saw that it was time to be going. The lantern lighted, the farewells said, he stood a moment on the door-step to sound the night with a look. "It is raining," he said.

His hosts came to the door to look for themselves. The rain was beginning, a spring rain in big heavy drops, under which the snow began to settle and to melt.

"The south-east wind has taken," Chapdelaine announced. "You may say the winter is almost finished."

Each in his way expressed relief and pleasure; but it was Maria who stayed longest on the doorstep, listening to the gentle patter of the rain, watching the obscure descent of the somber sky upon the more somber mass of the woods, breathing in the warm air that was blowing from the south.

Spring is near.—Spring is near.

She felt that never since the beginning of the world had there been a springtime like this springtime.

III

Three days later Maria heard in the morning, as she opened the door, a sound that for the moment fixed her to the spot. She stood still, and listened. It was a distant and continuous roar, the thunder of the high falls, which had been frozen and silent all winter.

"The ice is going down," she said, as she came in. "You can hear the falls." Then they began to speak once more of the season that was opening, and of the work that could be done.

May brought in turn warm rains and fine sunny days, which little by little worked their will upon the ice and snow heaped up in the long winter. The low stumps and roots came into sight, but the shade of fir and cypress, where they were thick set, shielded the snow in its long and painful disappearance; the roads were turned into bogs; where the moss showed brown, it was all swoln with water, and looked like a sponge. In other countries it was already springtime: the ardent upward labour of the sap, the putting forth of buds, and soon the leaves; but the Canadian soil, so near to the north, could only free itself

with great effort from its heavy winter mantle before reviving again.

Ten times in the course of the day Madame Chapdelaine or Maria opened the window, to relish the mildness of the air, to hear the whisper of the running water in which the last snow on the slopes was vanishing, and that other deep voice proclaiming that the Péribonka was set free, and driving joyously to the great Lake the masses of ice that came down from the north. In the evening the father Chapdelaine was sitting on the door-step smoking his pipe, and he said in meditation:

"François Paradis should soon be passing up. He said perhaps he would come to see us."

Maria answered, "Yes," very gently, and blessed the darkness that hid her face. He came ten days later, long after nightfall. The women were alone in the house with Tit' Bé and the children, the father being away at Honfleur for seed grain, and would not return until the morrow. Télesphore and Alma Rose were in bed, Tit' Bé was smoking a last pipe before the family prayers, when Chien barked several times, and went to sniff at the closed door. Almost at once two light knocks sounded. The visitor waited until he was bidden to come in, and then he stood in the doorway. He excused himself for the lateness of the hour, but with no lack of assurance.

"We were camped at the end of the portage above the falls," he said. "We had to pitch the

tent, and make the Belgians snug for the night. When I left, I knew well enough it was not quite the hour for a call, and that the roads through the woods would be bad. But I came none the less, and when I saw the light. . . His big Indian boots were covered with mud; he puffed a little between his words, as one who has been running; but his clear eyes were steady and full of confidence.

"It is only Tit' Bé that has changed," he continued. "When you left Mistassini, he was only so high."

His gesture indicated the height of a child. Madame Chapdelaine looked at him with great interest, doubly pleased at having a visit and being able to speak of old times.

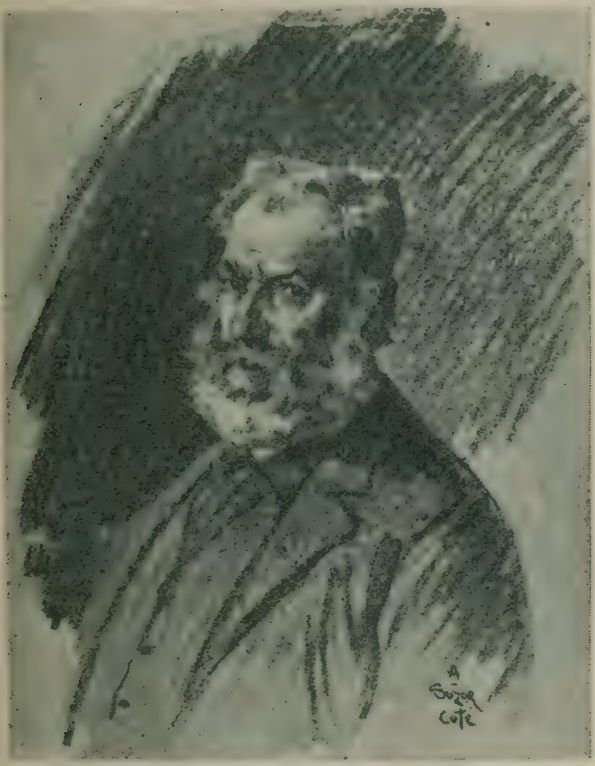
"You have not changed either in these seven years, not a bit; but Maria,—surely you must find a difference in her."

He gazed at Maria with a kind of wonder: "It is like this,—I saw her the other day at Péribonka."

His voice and manner meant to say, that seeing her a fortnight ago had blotted out all former times. But since they were speaking of her, he took the occasion to scrutinize her afresh.

Her strong and wholesome youth, her splendid thick hair, her brown neck, the honest simplicity of her eyes and of her easy attitude,—no doubt, he thought, all these were to be found in the little girl of seven years ago; and it was this made him

shake his head two or three times, as if to say she had not really changed at all. But, he caught



SAMUEL CHAPDELAINE

himself thinking in the same moment, it was himself who must be changed, since now the sight of her smote him to the heart.

Maria smiled, a little bashful, and then, after a moment, she in turn boldly lifted her eyes, and gazed at him.

A handsome boy, surely: beautiful in body by reason of his obvious strength, beautiful in face by reason of the clean-cut features and daring eyes. She allowed to herself with a touch of surprise that she remembered him as somewhat different, bolder, talkative, self assured; whereas now he hardly spoke at all, and showed complete artlessness in all he did. No doubt it was the expression of his face that created this feeling, and the frank hardihood of his manner. Madame Chapdelaine resumed her questions:

"So you sold the farm, when your father died, François?"

"Yes, I sold everything. I never was much good at farming, you know. To work in the shanties, hunt, make a little money at times by acting as guide, or by trading with the Indians—I took pleasure in that; but to be always scratching the same piece of ground, year in and year out, and to stay there,—I could not do that all my life; I should feel as if I were tethered like an animal to a stake.

"That is true; there are men like that, Samuel, for example, yourself, and many others. One might say the woods knew charms to make you come." . . She shook her head, and looked at him with wondering curiosity.

"You freeze your limbs in winter; you are eaten by flies in summer; live in a tent on the snow, or in a cabin full of cracks where the wind comes in; you would rather that than spend all your life quietly on a good farm in a place where there are shops and houses. Think: a fine piece of level land in an old parish, land without stump or hollow, a good warm house, all papered inside, fat cattle in the field or in the stable; for people well equipped with tools, and in good health,—is anything more pleasant or lovely?"

François Paradis looked at the floor, not answering, a little ashamed, perhaps, of his unreasonable tastes.

"It is a good life for those who like the land," he said at last; "but for me, I should not be happy."

It was the eternal misunderstanding between the two breeds, the pioneer and the settler, the peasants come from France, who preserved on the new soil their ideal of order and immutable peace, and those other peasants in whom the vast wilds had awakened an ancient atavism of vagabondage and adventure.

Having listened for fifteen years to her mother extolling the idyllic happiness of the farmers in the old parishes, Maria had quite naturally come to believe that she shared in those tastes; now she was not so sure. But she knew, at any rate, that not one of the rich young men of St. Prime, who wore Sunday coats of fine cloth with fur collars,

was the equal of François Paradis in his muddy boots and old woolen jersey.

In answer to other questions, he talked of his trips on the north shore of the Gulf, or even at the head waters of the rivers; he talked of them quietly and with a slight hesitation, not knowing exactly what should be told and what passed over in silence, since he was speaking to people who lived in places almost like those he named, and led almost the same kind of life.

"Up there, the winters are harder still than here, and longer too. You have only dogs to draw the sledges, fine strong dogs, but fierce and often only half tamed, and you feed them once a day only, in the evening, with frozen fish.—Yes, there are villages, but hardly any cultivation; the men live by hunting and fishing.—No, I never had any trouble with the Indians; I am always on good terms with them. I know nearly all those on the Mistassini and on the river from here, because they used to come to our place before my father died. You see, he often hunted in winter, when he was not at the shanties; and one winter when he was at the head of the Rivière-aux-Foins by himself, he was chopping down a tree for the fire, and it fell the wrong way; it was the Indians who found him by chance in the morning, borne down and half frozen, although the weather was mild. He was on their hunting ground, and they could easily have pretended not to see him, and let him die

there; but they put him on their sleigh, and took him to their camp, and cared for him. You knew my father; he was a rough man, fond of a drink, but just and with a good memory for help of that kind. So when he left those Indians, he told them to come and see him in the spring, when they came down to Pointe Bleue with their skins: "François Paradis, of Mistassini," he told them. "You will not forget—François Paradis." And when they stopped in the spring, coming down the river, he lodged them properly, and going away each one carried a new ax, a good woolen blanket, and tobacco enough for three months. After that they stayed with us every spring, and my father always had the choice of their best skins for less than the companies' agents had to pay. When he died it was exactly the same with me, since I was his son, and my name like his, François Paradis. If I had had more capital, I could have made a lot of money with them—a lot of money."

He seemed a little confused at having talked so much, and got up to leave. "We shall be coming down again in a few weeks, and I will try to stay longer," he said once more. "It is nice to see each other again."

In the doorway his clear eyes sought Maria's eyes, as if he wished a message to carry with him into the big green woods where he was going; but he took away nothing. In her simplicity, she feared she had already shown herself too forward,

and she kept her eyes persistently lowered, just like the rich young girls who come back with airs of inhuman purity from the convents of Chicoutimi.

A few moments later the two women and Tit'Bé knelt for evening prayer. The mother prayed very fast, in a loud voice, and the two other voices made response in an indistinct murmur; five Patèrs, five Aves, the Acts, then the long litany like a chanted song.

"Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us now, and in the hour of our death."

"Immaculate Heart of Jesus, have mercy upon us."

The window had remained open, and let in the distant roar of the falls. The first mosquitoes of the springtime, attracted by the light, also entered and paraded their shrill music in the house. Tit'Bé, seeing them, went to shut the window and then came back to kneel beside the others.

"Great St. Joseph, pray for us."

"St. Isidore, pray for us."

The prayer was finished, and as the mother Chapdelaine undressed, she sighed with an air of content:

"How nice it is to have a call when we hardly see anybody but Eutrope Gagnon from one end of the year to the other. That's what comes of living so far away in the woods. In the days when I was a girl at St. Gédéon the house was full of

visitors, almost every Saturday evening and every Sunday: Adelard St. Onge, who courted me so long; Wilfred Tremblay, the merchant, who had such good manners, and always tried to speak like the French; and others—without counting your father who came to see us nearly every week for three years before I made up my mind.

Three years. — Maria reflected that she had only seen François Paradis twice in all her girlhood days, and she felt ashamed of her emotion.

IV

With June came the real spring, abruptly after a few cold days. The strong sun heated the earth and the woods; the last patches of snow vanished, even in the shade of the close-set trees; little by little the Péribonka river rose along its high rocky banks, drowning the alder thickets and the roots of the lowest spruces; deep mud filled the roads. The Canadian earth cast off the last vestiges of winter with a kind of rough haste, as if in fear of the other winter already on its way.

Esdras and Da' Bé Chapdelaine came back from the shanties, where they had worked all winter. Esdras was the eldest, a big boy with a powerful body, brown of face and black haired, whose low forehead and protruding chin looked like a Neronian mask, haughty and a trifle coarse; but he spoke softly, weighing his words, and always showed great patience. Of the tyrant he had nothing but the face, as if the cold of the long winters had combined with the sensible good humour of his race to create in him a quiet and gentle heart, which gave the lie to his forbidding aspect.

Da' Bé was tall too, but more slender; he was lively and cheerful, taking after his father

The Chapdelaines had given fine, stately, sonorous names to their first two children, Esdras and Maria; but after these they had doubtless tired of such solemnity, for the two that came next had never heard their real names pronounced; they had always been called Da' Bé and Tit'Bé, loving diminutive pet names. The last two, again, had been baptized with a return to ceremony: Télesphore, Alma Rose.

"When the boys come back, we are going to make land," the father had affirmed; and now, they hastened to the work, with the help of Edwige Légaré, their hired man.

In the country of Quebec the spelling of names and their use has become a matter of uncertainty. A population scattered over a vast half-wild country, unlettered for the most part, and having no other advisers than the priests, is accustomed to think only of the sound of their names, without troubling about their written appearance or their gender. Naturally, the pronunciation varies from mouth to mouth and from family to family, and when at last some solemn occasion demands recourse to writing, each one claims the privilege of spelling his baptismal name in his own way, without allowing for a moment that there might be a fixed canon for them. Borrowings from other tongues have made still more uncertain all that

pertains to spelling or gender. They sign Denise, Denije, or Deneije; Conrad or Courade; men call themselves Herménégilde, Aglaé, Edwige.

Edwige Légaré had been working for the Chapdelaines every summer for eleven years, as hired man. That is, for a wage of twenty dollars a month, from four o'clock in the morning until nine at night, he put himself to any work that had to be done, and brought to it a fierce ardour which was never exhausted, for he was one of those men who are by nature incapable of doing anything without giving the utmost of their force and energy in a spasmodic passion that is ever renewed.

Short and broad, he had eyes of surprisingly clear blue—a rare thing in the country of Quebec—at once keen and innocent, set in a face the colour of clay, capped by hair of nearly like colour, and always marked by cuts; for with an inexplicable vanity he shaved twice and three times a week, always in the evening, before a bit of looking glass hung above the pump, by the dusky glimmer of the little lamp, guiding the razor over his stiff beard with groans of exertion and pain. Clad in shirt and breeches of an earthy brown homespun, shod with great dusty boots, he was, in truth, all of the colour of the earth, and his face expressed the formidable quality of the soil. Chapdelaine, his three sons, and the hired man proceeded to clear the land.

The forest still crowded close to the buildings they had erected some years earlier: the small square house, the barn of ill-joinered planks, the

EDWIGE LÉGARÉ

stable built of rough logs with rags and earth stuffed in the cracks. Between the fields already cleared bare and the great trees with somber

foliage extended a large area which the ax had but faintly touched. A few living trees had been cut and used for carpentry; some dead trunks, sawn and split, had fed the big iron stove all one winter; but the ground was still littered with a chaos of stumps, interlacing roots, fallen trees too rotten to burn, and other trees dead but still standing in the midst of the alder coppice.

The five men made their way one morning towards this piece of land and set to work without a word, for the task of each had been fixed in advance.

The father Chapdelaine and Da'Bé faced each other on either side of a standing tree, and their axes, helved with black birch, swung in cadence. Each one first cut a deep notch in the wood, chopping patiently on the same spot; then the ax suddenly rose, attacking the trunk obliquely a foot higher up, making a chip fly, as thick as the hand and split along the grain. When the two notches nearly met, one of the men stopped, and the other struck more slowly, at each blow allowing his ax to remain for a moment in the cut: the strip of wood which, by a sort of miracle, still held the tree upright gave way at last; the trunk leaned, and the two woodmen drew back a step and watched it fall, each uttering a loud cry in order that the other might beware.

Edwige Légaré and Esdras then came forward, and when the tree was not too heavy for their

united strength, each took hold of an end, crossing their strong hands under the round of the trunk; then straightening up, with straining backs and arms that cracked at the joints, they carried it to a pile, with short tottering steps, walking carefully over the other trees still lying on the ground. When they judged the load too heavy, Tit'Bé came with the horse, Charles-Eugène, drawing a whiffletree to which a strong chain was attached; the chain was passed around the trunk and made fast; the horse arched his back, and with a power that knotted the muscles of his haunches dragged the trunk over the ground, grazing the stumps and crushing the young alders.

At midday Maria came out upon the door-step, and announced by a prolonged call that dinner was ready. The men slowly righted themselves among the stumps, drying with the back of the hand the drops of sweat running into their eyes, and took their way to the house.

The pea soup was ready, smoking in the plates. The five men seated themselves slowly at the table as if a little dulled by their hard work, but as they drew breath, a great hunger awoke, and they began to eat with avidity. The two women served them, filling the empty plates, carrying the big dish of pork and boiled potatoes, pouring hot tea into the cups. When the meat had disappeared, they filled their saucers with maple syrup which they soaked up with large pieces of fresh bread;

then soon satisfied, because they had eaten quickly and without a word, they pushed back their plates, and turned about on their chairs with sighs of content, plunged their hands into their pockets in search of pipes and pigs' bladders bulging with tobacco.

Edwige Légaré sat down on the door-step, and repeated two or three times: "I have eaten well—I have eaten well," with the air of a judge who gives an impartial decision; after this he set his back to the jamb of the door, and allowed the smoke from his pipe and the glances of his small pale eyes to pursue in the air the same unwitting vagrancy. The father Chapdelaine settled down little by little on his chair and finished by falling asleep; the others smoked and talked of their work.

"If there is anything," said the mother, "that would console me for living so far in the woods, it is seeing my men make a good piece of land. A good piece of land, full of trees, and stumps, and roots, that one sees a fortnight afterwards bare as the hand, ready for the plough,—I am sure nothing in the world can be more beautiful or lovelier than that."

The others assented with a motion of the head, relishing the picture in silence. Presently Chapdelaine woke up, refreshed by his sleep and ready for work. They got up, and went out of the house. The space on which they had worked in the forenoon was still littered with stumps and encumbered

with alder bushes. They began to cut and pull out the alders, seizing bundles of stems in their hands, and hacking them off with strokes of the ax, or again digging the soil about the roots, and tearing out the whole bush by a single wrench. When the alders had disappeared there remained the stumps.

Légaré and Esdras attacked the smaller ones without any other advantage than their axes and stout wooden pries. With strokes of the ax they cut the roots which had crept on the surface of the ground; then they thrust in a pry at the base of the trunk, and bore down with all their might, their breasts supported on the wooden bar. When their power was not enough to break the hundred ligaments which bound the tree to the earth, Légaré continued to bear down with all his weight, to raise it a little, with groans of distress, and Esdras again took his ax, and chopped furiously at the surface of the ground, severing one after another the last roots.

Farther off, the other three men operated the stumping machine to which the horse Charles-Eugène was harnessed. The framework in the form of a truncated pyramid was drawn above a large stump and lowered; the stump was secured by chains passing over a sheave, and at the other end of the chain the horse pulled sharply, throwing all his weight forward, and making clods of earth fly under the caulks of his shoes. It was a short, desperate charge, a stormy burst often arrested

after only a few steps by a resistance like that of a savage fist; then the broad steel blades of the axes rose again, threw off a flash of sunlight, and fell upon the great roots with a dull sound, whilst the horse looked about stupidly, breathing a moment before the curt order that was to send him forward again. And after that there remained the great uprooted stumps to drag and roll over the ground to the piles, with vast exertion of backs and stiffened arms, of hands with swoln veins and soiled with earth, struggling passionately with the massive trunk and the thick twisted roots.

The sun slipped towards the horizon, disappeared; the sky took on delicate pale tints above the gloomy border of the forest, and supper-time brought to the house five men the colour of the earth.

Whilst serving them, the mother Chapdelaine asked after a hundred details of the day's work; and when the vision of the plot of cleared land, splendidly bare, and at length ready for cultivation, penetrated into her mind, she betrayed a kind of mystical ecstasy.

With her closed hands upon her hips, disdaining to sit at table, she extolled the beauty of the world as she comprehended it: not that dehumanized beauty, artificially fabricated by the ecstasies of city dwellers, of high barren mountains and perilous seas, but the placid and real beauty of a country with rich soil, of a level land which has

for picturesque only the orderliness of long parallel furrows and the gentleness of running water, of a land that gives itself naked to the embraces of the sun with nuptial abandon.

She became the minstrel of the heroic exploits of the four Chapdelaines and of Edwige Légaré, of their battle against barbarian nature, and their victory of this day. She distributed praise, and proclaimed her legitimate pride, whilst the five men silently smoked their pipes, steadfast as images, after their long toil—images of the colour of clay, with eyes hollow from fatigue.

"The stumps are hard," the father Chapdelaine declared; "the roots have not rotted in the earth as much as I should have expected. I calculate that we shall not be clear before three weeks." He questioned Légaré with his glance, and the man assented with gravity.

"Three weeks. Yes, *blasphème*. That is what I calculate too."

They fell silent again, patient and resolute, like those who enter upon a long war.

The Canadian spring had, as yet, known but a few weeks of life, when the summer of the calendar was already on its way; and it seemed as if the divinity which ordered the climate of the place had suddenly prodded it with an imperious thumb, to hasten the natural progress of the seasons, to make them conform once more in their cycle with the happy countries of the south. For the heat came

on suddenly, torrid, a heat almost as ungoverned as the cold of winter. The tips of the spruce and the pine, forgotten by the wind, were fixed in a perpetual stillness; above their somber outline extended a sky to which the absence of clouds lent an appearance of stillness too; and from dawn until dusk the merciless sun roasted the earth.

The five men continued the work, and day by day the clearing they had made extended a little farther behind them, bare, and marked with deep gashes which revealed the good soil. Maria went one morning to carry water to them.

The father Chapdelaine and Tit'Bé were cutting alders; Da'Bé and Esdras were piling logs. Edwige Légaré had attacked a huge stump by himself; with one hand against the trunk, he had seized a root with the other, as in a struggle one might seize the leg of a mighty opponent, and he fought against the joint inertia of wood and earth, as against an enemy filled with hatred and enraged by resistance. Of a sudden the stump gave way, and lay upon the ground; he passed his hand over his forehead and sat down on a root, covered with sweat and stupified by exertion. When Maria came near with the pail half full of water, the others having already drunk, he was still motionless and panting, and repeating in a dazed fashion:

"I am losing my senses. Oh! I am losing my senses." But he stopped when he saw her coming, and then gave out a bellow:

"Cold water! *Blasphème* Give me the cold water."

He seized the pail and drained it to the half, poured the rest over his head and down his neck, and then dripping wet threw himself upon the vanquished stump, and began to roll it towards one of the piles, as one carries off a prize.

LE DÉFRICHEUR

Maria stayed there for a few minutes watching the men at work and observing the result of their labour, which became more evident from day to day, and then she took the path to the house again, swinging her empty pail, happy at feeling herself alive and strong under the shining sun, idly dreaming of the happy things that were in train, and must come very soon if only she prayed with sufficient fervour and patience.

Now, far away, she yet heard the men's voices following after her, echoing from the heat-hardened earth. Esdras, with hands already clasped under a young fallen pine, said in an easy tone:

"Steady.—Together."

Légaré seized another obstinate adversary, and was swearing in a muffled voice:

"*Blasphème.* I will make you squirm, you ugly—"

His panting could be heard almost as loud as his words. He took breath for an instant, then flung himself into the struggle again, stiffening his arms and swaying his heavy loins. And once more his voice was raised in imprecation and abuse:

"I tell you I am going to get you — you beggarly lot. How hot it is,—I am going to die."

His plaint was turned into a loud cry:

"Boss, clearing this land is going to be the death of us."

The voice of Chapdelaine answered, a little stifled but cheerful:

"Courage, Edwige, courage; the pea soup will soon be ready."

Soon, indeed, Maria came out again upon the door-step, and with open hands on each side of her lips to make the sound carry, she announced dinner with a loud chanting cry.

Towards evening the wind rose, and a delicious freshness descended upon the earth like an absolu-

tion. But the pale sky still remained free from clouds.

"If the fine weather continues," said the mother Chapdelaine, "the blueberries will be ripe for Ste. Anne's Day."

V

The fine weather continued, and as early as the first days of July the blueberries were ripening.

In the burnt woods on the stony hillsides, wherever sparse trees admitted the sunlight, the ground was almost entirely pink with the bright pink of the flowers on the clusters of laurel; the first blueberries, also pink, were blended with these flowers; but in the persistent warmth they were slowly taking on a pale blue tint, then a royal blue, and at last a shade of violet; and when July brought Ste. Anne's Day, the bushes laden with berries formed large purple patches amidst the pink of the laurel flowers now beginning to fade.

The woods of Quebec are rich in wild berries; the cranberry, the Indian pear, the currant, the sarsaparilla grow freely in the wake of the wide fires; but the blueberry, which is the "luce" or "myrtille" of France is the most abundant of all, and the most delicious. From July to September picking blueberries is a real industry for many families, who spend the whole day in the woods, series of children of all heights, swinging their tin pails, empty in the morning, in the evening filled

and heavy. Others only gather blueberries for their own use, to make that excellent jam and those pies, the national dessert of French Canada.

Two or three times early in July Maria went to gather blueberries with Télesphore and Alma Rose; but the moment of perfect ripeness had not yet come, and the spoil they brought home was hardly enough for a few pies that were comically small.

"On Ste. Anne's Day," the mother said to console them, "we shall all go picking; the men too, and those who do not bring home a full pail will not have any to eat."

But Saturday evening before Ste. Anne's Day was for the Chapdelaines the occasion of a memorable party, such as their little house in the woods had not yet known.

When the men came in from work, Eutrope Gagnon was already there. He had his supper, he said, and whilst the others were taking their meal he sat down near the door, balancing his chair on two legs in the fresh breeze. When their pipes were lit, the talk naturally turned upon the work on the land and the care of the cattle.

"With five men," Eutrope said, "you can clear a big piece in a short time. But when one works alone, as I do, without a horse to haul the heavy logs, it does not go very fast, and I have a lot of trouble. But it is going ahead all the same, going ahead."

Madame Chapdelaine liked him; the idea of his solitary labour in the good cause filled her with

a warm sympathy, and by way of encouragement she said:

"It does not go so fast when you are alone, that is true; but a single man keeps himself without much expense. Then your brother, Egide, will be coming down from the drive with two or three hundred dollars at least, in time for the hay and the harvest; and if both of you stay here next winter, in less than two years you will have a fine farm."

He assented with a nod, and involuntarily looked at Maria, intimating that two years from now, if all went well, he might perhaps dream . . .

"Is the drive going well?" Esdras asked. "Have you any news from down there?"

"I heard through Ferdina Larouche, one of Thadée Larouche's boys from Bonfieur, who came from La Tuque last month. He said it was going well; the men had no great hardship."

The shanties, the drive, these are the two main themes in the industry of the woods, for the people of Quebec even more important than the farm. From October to April the axes swing without respite, and the heavy horses draw the logs on the snow to the banks of the frozen rivers; in the spring the piles of wood, one after the other, slip down into the new water, and begin their long and difficult course adown the rapids. At every bend of the river, at every fall, wherever the countless logs may block and pile, there must be a force of strong and clever drivers accustomed to the

perilous task, to run on the half sunk logs, to break the barrier, and all day with a and pole help to an easy descent this stretch of forest moving down.

"Hardship," exclaimed Légaré with scorn. "The young men in these times don't know what it is to have hardship. When they have spent three months in the woods, they hurry down to buy tan boots, hard hats, and cigarettes, to go and see the girls. And even in the shanties, in these times, they are fed just as if they were in hotels, with meat and potatoes all winter. Thirty years ago . . ."

He stopped for a moment, and with a single shake of his head expressed the tremendous changes the years had brought.

"Thirty years ago, when they were building the line to bring the trains from Quebec, I was there, worse luck, and I tell you that was hardship. I was only sixteen years old, but I chopped with the rest to clear the way, always twenty-five miles ahead of the steel, and I was fourteen months without seeing a house. We had no tents winter or summer; nothing but shelters of fir boughs each one made for himself; and from morning to night it was chop, chop, chop, eaten by flies, and on the same day drenched with rain and roasted with the sun.

"On Monday morning we opened a bag of flour, and made pancakes, a bucketful; and all the rest of the week, three or four times a day, to eat,

we went and took from the bucket. Before Thursday came there were no more pancakes; they were all stuck together; there was nothing but a mass of dough. A man would cut off a big piece of dough with his knife, put that in his belly; and then it was chop and chop again.

"When we got to Chicoutimi, where provisions come by water, we were worse than savages, almost quite naked, our skin torn by the branches, and I knew some who began to cry when they were told they could go home, because they thought they were going to find all their people dead, the time appeared so long. That was hardship for you."

"All true," said Chapdelaine. "I remember the time. There was not a single house above the Lake: nothing but Indians and a few hunters who went up in summer by canoe and in winter by dog sleighs, just as they now do in the Labrador." The young people listened with interest to these narratives of other times.

"And now," said Esdras, "here we are fifteen miles beyond the Lake, and when the boat from Roberval is running we can reach the cars in twelve hours."

They thought of these things for a while without speaking, of the relentless life of earlier times, of the short day's journey that now alone separated them from the miracle of the iron way; and they were filled with a sincere wonder.

THE HOUSE IN THE WOODS

All at once Chien growled low; a sound of steps was heard outside. "Another visitor," the mother Chapdelaine cried in joyous surprise.

Maria got up too, excited, smoothing her hair without thinking of it; but it was Ephrem Surprenant, a resident of Honfleur, who opened the door.

"We have come to call," he cried in a loud voice, like a man proclaiming important news. Behind him came a stranger who saluted, and smiled politely.

"This is my nephew, Lorenzo," he announced at once, son of my brother Elzéar, who died last fall." You are not acquainted with him; it is a long time since he left the country to live in the States."

They were prompt to offer a chair to the young man who came from the States, and his uncle made it his duty to establish with certitude his genealogy on both sides, and to give all necessary details of his age, his trade, and his way of life, according to the Canadian custom.

"Yes, a son of my brother Elzéar, who married a young Bourglouis of Kiskising. You ought to know that, yourself, Madame Chapdelaine."

From the depths of her memory the mother Chapdelaine soon brought up the remembrance of several Surprenants and as many Bourglouis, and went over the list, with their first names, their various successive residences, and a complete nominal roll of their alliances.

"That's it — just so — and this one, he is Lorenzo. He has worked in the States for several years in the factories?"

Each one with unaffected curiosity scrutinized Lorenzo Surprenant. He had a full face with fine features, quiet gentle eyes, white hands; with his head a little on one side he smiled politely, without irony or shyness, under their levelled gaze.

"He has come," his uncle went on, "to settle the business that was left after Elzéar's death, and to try to sell the farm."

"Does he not want to keep the farm and settle down as a habitant?" Chapdelaine enquired.

Lorenzo Surprenant broadened his smile, and shook his head. "No, it does not tempt me to become a habitant; not in the least. I earn good wages where I am. I am well satisfied. I am familiar with the work."

He stopped at that; but he allowed it to be understood that, after the life he had lived and the journeys he had made, existence on the land between a poor village and the woods had no charm for him.

"When I was a girl," said the mother, "nearly every one went to the States. Farming did not pay as well as it does now; prices were low; we were told of the high wages earned down there in the factories, and every year one family after

another sold their land almost for nothing, and went away from Canada. There were some who made good wages, of course, especially families with plenty of girls; but now things have changed, and we do not see so many going away."

"So you are going to sell the farm?"

"Yes, I have talked about it with three Frenchmen who arrived at Mistook last month; I think it will be done."

"And are there many Canadians down there where you are? Do they speak French?"

"At the place where I was first, in the State of Maine, there were more Canadians than Americans or Irish; every one spoke French; but where I am now, that is, in the State of Massachusetts, there are not so many; there are some families however; we spend many an evening together."

"Samuel once thought of going to the West," the mother said, "but I would not have liked it. Amongst people who speak nothing but English I would have been unhappy all my life. I always said to him, 'Samuel, it is amongst Canadians we Canadians are best off.' "

When French Canadians speak of themselves they always say "Canadians," nothing more; and to all other races which after them populated the country as far as the Pacific they have been careful to apply names indicating their origin: English, Irish, Poles, or Russians, without admitting for a single moment that their sons, even if born in the

country, have an equal right to the name, Canadians. It is a title they quite naturally reserve for themselves, without desire to offend, in virtue of their heroic precedence.

"And is it a big place where you are?"

"Ninety thousand," said Lorenzo with an affectation of modesty.

"Ninety thousand,— larger than Quebec!"

"Yes, and by train, it is only an hour to Boston. That is a real big place."

Then he began to speak of the great American cities and of their splendours, of the exuberant and easy life, filled with unheard of refinements, which artisans earning good wages enjoy.

They listened in silence. Framed in the doorway, the last crimson tints of the sky were dissolving into paler shades for which the obscure mass of the forest formed a vast black base. The mosquitoes were coming in myriads, so many that their buzzing caused a clamour, a full note that filled the clearing like the soughing of the wind.

"Télesphore," his father ordered, "make a smudge. Take the old pail."

Télesphore took the bucket with the loose bottom, packed it with earth, and filled it with dry twigs and shavings, which he set alight. When the fire rose in a clear flame, he brought an armful of grass and leaves, and covered the blaze; a column of acrid smoke went up, which the wind blew into the house, driving out the innumerable and frantic

mosquitoes. With sighs of content they could at last enjoy a little ease, and desist from the warfare.

The last mosquito came to rest on little Alma Rose's face. Gravely she recited the words of the ritual: *Mouche, mouche diabolique, mon nez n'est pas une place publique.* Then she quickly crushed the little beast with a slap.

The smoke drifted in at the door in a slanting column; once in the house and sheltered from the force of the wind, it blew out and expanded in tenuous clouds; the walls looked vague and far away; the group seated between the door and the stove was resolved into a circle of brown faces suspended in a white haze.

"Good night to all," came in a clear voice; and François Paradis emerged from the gl om, and stood on the door-step.

Maria had been awaiting his arrival for several weeks. Half an hour ago the sound of footsteps outside had made the blood mount to her temples; and now the presence of him whom she expected struck her as an exciting surprise.

"Give up your chair, Da'Bé," his mother exclaimed.

Four visitors come from three different directions and assembled in her house,—no more was wanted to fill her with joyful excitement. In truth this was a memorable evening.

"There now; you are always saying that we are lost in the woods, and that we see no one."

her husband exulted. "Count: eleven grown up people."

All the chairs in the house were occupied. Esdras, Tit'Bé, and Eutrope Gagnon sat on the bench; the father Chapdelaine was sitting on an upturned box; Télesphore and Alma Rose on the steps, watching the ever ascending smoke.

"Yes, but," cried Ephrem Surprenant, "that makes plenty of boys, and only one girl."

They counted the young men: three Chapdelaines, Eutrope Gagnon, Lorenzo Surprenant, and François Paradis. As for the one girl . . . All eyes turned on Maria, who smiled feebly, and lowered her eyes, abashed.

"Had you a good trip, François? He went up the river with some foreigners who were going to buy furs from the Indians," the father explained. Then to the other visitors he formally introduced—François Paradis, son of François Paradis of St. Michel de Mistassini.

Eutrope Gagnon knew him by name; Ephrem Surprenant had known his father, "a big man, even bigger than this one, and no one like him for strength." It was only needed to explain the presence of Lorenzo Surprenant, who came from the States, and all was in order.

"A good trip?" François said in reply. "No, not very good. One of the Belgians took the fever and nearly died. After that we found the season too late; many of the Indian families had already

gone down to Ste. Anne de Chicoutimi, and we could not find them; to finish, they upset one of the canoes running a rapid on the way down, and we had the trouble of fishing out the skins, without taking into account that one boss was nearly drowned,—the very one that had the fever. No, we were unlucky all the way through. But, here we are, all the same, and that is another job done."

He indicated by a gesture that he had done his work, received his pay, and that the eventual profit or loss was little to him.

"That makes another job done," he repeated slowly. "The Belgians were in a hurry to be back at Péribonka to-morrow which is Sunday; but as they have with them another man who knows the country, I let them finish the run alone, and came here to spend the evening with you. It is nice to see houses again."

His gaze wandered with satisfaction over the poor interior filled with smoke, and over the people who sat around. Amongst all the brown faces, tanned by the open air and the sun, his face was the brownest and the most tanned; his clothes showed many rents; a piece of his torn woolen jersey fell down on his shoulder; moccasins replaced his spring boots. He seemed to have brought with him something of wild nature from the headwaters of the rivers, where Indians and great game are ensconced as in a safe retreat. And Maria, whose way of life made her incapable

of understanding the beauty of that nature, she being so close to it, yet felt that some magic was at work, instilling into her nostrils the intoxication of its philters.

Esdras had gone to look for the playing cards, cards with light red backs, worn at the corners, from which the queen of hearts had been lost, and was replaced by a piece of bright red card-board, bearing the inscription in plain terms, "dame de cœur."

The game was "quatre-sept." The two Surprenants, uncle and nephew, had Madame Chapdelaine and Maria for partners; after each game the pair that was beaten left the table, and two others took their place. Night fell; by the open window a few flies came in and flaunted through the house their tormenting music and their stings.

"Télesphore," cried Esdras, "Look to the smudge; the flies are coming back."

A few minutes later the smoke filled the house again, thick and almost stifling, but gladly endured. The evening followed its placid course. An hour of play, an exchange of talk with visitors who carried news of the great world—they still call that pleasure in the country of Quebec.

Between the games Lorenzo Surprenant entertained Maria with an account of his life and travels; or even asked her about her own life. He never thought of assuming a pretentious or superior

air, and yet she was embarrassed, finding so little to say, and answered as if she were kind of ashamed.

The others talked among themselves or watched the players. Madame Chapdelaine recalled the numerous parties she had known at St. Gédéon, when she was a girl, and she looked with obvious pleasure from one to the other of the three strange young men assembled beneath her roof. But Maria sat at the table, played her cards, and then went to a seat near the open door without even looking about her. Lorenzo Surprenant was constantly at her side talking to her; but she often felt Eutrope Gagnon's gaze upon her with his habitual expression of patient watchfulness; and on the other side of the door, she knew, François Paradis was leaning forward, his elbows on his knees, silent, with his fine face ruddy with the sun, and his intrepid eyes.

"Maria is not at her best this evening," her mother said as if to excuse her. "She is not much accustomed to visitors,—you see."

Had she but known!

Four hundred miles away, at the headwaters of the rivers, those savages who had fled before the missionaries and the merchants were crowding around a fire of dry pine wood before their tents, and casting their eyes over a world yet filled for them, as in the earliest days, with occult and mysterious powers: the giant Wendigo who forbids to hunt on his demesne; philters, malevolent or benign, which

from leaves and roots aged men full of experience have skill to prepare; all the gamut of magic and sorcery. And here, just on the border of the white man's world, one day's journey from the railway, in a house filled with fumes, an imperious spell floated in the smoke, and to the eyes of three young men made appear invested with inconceivable grace a pretty, guileless girl with downcast eyes.

The night grew late; the visitors went away; first, the two Surprenants; then Eutrope Gagnon; François Paradis alone remained, ready to go, but inclined to hesitate.

"You will sleep here to-night, François?" Mr. Chapdelaine asked. His wife did not wait for a reply.

"Certainly," she said. "And to-morrow we shall all go to pick blueberries. It is the fête of Ste. Anne."

When, a few moments later, François went up the ladder with the boys, Maria experienced an exciting pleasure. He seemed to her in this way to come a little closer to her, and to enter into the circle of rightful affections.

The morrow was a bluey day, one of those days when the shining sky casts a little of its own clear colour on the earth. The young grass, the wheat in blade, were of a green that was infinitely tender and touching, and even the somber woods took on an azure tint.

François Paradis came down the ladder in the morning, transformed, in clean clothes borrowed from Da'Bé and Esdras; and when he had washed and shaved, the mother Chapdelaine complimented him upon his good appearance.

When the morning meal was over, they recited a *chapelet* together at the hour of the morning mass; and after that the long wonderful leisure of the Sabbath stretched out before them. But the programme for the day had been settled. Eutrope Gagnon arrived as they were finishing dinner; he had eaten his at an earlier hour; and soon afterwards they all set out, furnished with various pails, dishes, and tin mugs.

The blueberries were full ripe. In the burnt woods the purple of the berries and the green of the leaves now subdued the rosy tint on the last flowers of the laurel. The children soon set to work picking with shouts of glee; but their elders scattered in the woods, looking for the large patches where one could sit on one's heels and fill a bucket in an hour. The noise of their footsteps on the brushwood and in the alder thickets, the shouts of Télesphore and Alma Rose calling to one another,—all these sounds diminished little by little, and about each picker there was nothing but the murmur of black flies drunk with the sunshine, and the sound of the wind in the branches of the young birch and poplars.

"There is a fine patch here," a voice called. Maria got up, her heart in excitement, and

went to join François Paradis who was kneeling down behind some alder bushes. Side by side for some time they diligently gathered blueberries, then plunged together into the woods, stepping over fallen trees, and casting their eyes about for the violet patches of ripe berries.

"They are not plentiful this year," François said. "The spring frosts killed them." He brought to the picking of berries his experience of the woods. "In the hollows and among the alders the snow will have remained longer, and protected them from the early frost."

They sought and made some happy finds: large areas of bushes laden with huge berries which they steadily poured into their pails, which were full in an hour. They got up, and sat on a fallen tree to rest.

Countless mosquitoes and black flies whirled in the hot afternoon air. Every moment they had to be driven off; they made a frantic sweep and soon came back, pitiless, reckless, concerned only to find a square inch of skin for their stings; with their poignant notes was mingled the hum of the dreadful black flies, and the woods was filled as with a great endless sound. Green trees were scarce; only some young birches, a few poplars, and alder bushes waved their leaves in midst of the colonnade of stripped and blackened trunks.

François Paradis looked around him to get his bearings. "The others cannot be far away," he said.

"No," Maria answered in a low voice. But neither of them gave a call.

A squirrel came down the trunk of a dead birch, and with his sharp eyes watched for a moment before risking himself on the ground. In the midst of the drunken clamour of the flies, locusts, laden with fertility, went past with a dry crackling sound; a breath of wind carried through the alders the distant rumble of the falls.

François Paradis stole a glance at Maria, then turned away, and firmly clasped his hands. How good she was to look upon! To sit beside her; to catch a glimpse of her swelling breast, her fine modest, gentle face, the easy freedom of her rare gestures and attitudes—a great hunger for her came upon him, and at the same time a wondrous affection, because he had lived nearly all his life alone with other men, austerely, in the great wild woods or on the snowy plains.

He felt that she was one of those women who, when they give themselves, give all without reckoning: the love of body and of heart, the strength of arms in the daily task, the perfect devotion of a spirit that will not turn aside. And it all appeared so precious he was afraid to ask for it.

"I am going down to Grand'Mère next week," he said in a low voice, "to work on the timber sluice. But I will not take a drink, Maria, not a single one."

He stopped, and then with downcast eyes asked abruptly: "Perhaps . . . Have they been saying anything to you against me?"

"No."

"It is true that I had the habit of taking a drink pretty well, when I came down from the shanties and the drive; but that is ended. You see, when a fellow has spent six months in the woods working hard, having misery and never any pleasure, and arrives at La Tuque or Jonquières with all the winter's pay in his pocket, it is easy enough for his head to be a little turned; he spends money and warms himself up, sometimes... But that is at an end.

"And it is also true that I swore a bit. Living all the time with rough men in the woods or on the rivers,—that is the custom. There was a time when I used to swear pretty bad, and Curé Tremblay once rebuked me for having said before him that I was not afraid of the devil. But that is over, Maria. I am going to work all summer at two dollars and a-half a day. And I will surely put the money aside. And in the fall I am certain to find a job as foreman in a shanty with high wages. Next spring I will have more than five hundred dollars clear savings, and I will come back."

He hesitated again, and the question he was about to put changed upon his lips:

"You will be here then—next spring?"

"Yes."

And after this simple question and the still more simple reply, they fell silent and remained a long time so, silent and solemn, because they had exchanged their vows.

VI

In July the hay had begun to mature, and when the middle of August came, they had only to wait for a dry spell to cut, and put it in the barn. But after several weeks of continuous fine weather, the frequent changes of wind, which prevail over the greater part of the province of Quebec, had begun. Every morning the men examined the sky, and took counsel.

"The wind is turning to the south east; *blasphème*; it is going to be wet again, that is sure," said Edwige Légaré in despair.

Or Samuel Chapdelaine carefully scrutinized the white clouds that surged above the somber trees, lightly crossed the clearing and disappeared behind the heights on the opposite side. "If the north-west wind holds until to-morrow, we can commence," he declared.

But on the morrow the wind had changed once more, and it seemed as if the sprightly clouds of yesterday came back in long tatters, disordered and rent, like the remnants of an army after defeat.

The mother Chapdelaine foresaw certain disas-

ter: "I tell you that we will not have fine weather for the haying. It appears that down the lake some people of the same parish have gone to law with one another. The good God is not pleased with such doings; I am sure of that."

But the divinity at length showed some indulgence, and the wind blew strong and steady from the north-west for three days, giving assurance of dry weather. The scythes had been sharpened a long time before, and the five men set to work on the morning of the third day. Légaré, Esdras, and the father Chapdelaine wielded the scythes, Da'Bé and Tit'Bé followed them step by step with rakes, and quickly piled the mown hay. Towards evening, all five took the forks, and made cocks, high and well formed, against a possible change of wind. But the weather remained fine. For five days they kept on, swinging the scythes all day long from right to left, with that large free movement which seems so easy to a practised scytheman, but is the most difficult to learn, and the hardest of all the work on a farm.

The flies and the mosquitoes rose in swarms amidst the cut hay, and tormented the mowers with their stings; the glowing sun burned their necks, and the drops of sweat burned their eyes; the stiffness of their continuously bent backs became so bad towards evening that they could not stand up straight without a grimace of pain. But they toiled from dawn to night, not losing a moment,

scanting their meals, happy and grateful for the favourable weather.

Three or four times a day Maria or Télesphore brought them a pail of water which they hid under some branches to keep it cool; and when the heat, the work, and the dust of the hay had parched their throats, they went in turn to drink great gulps of water, and to pour it over their wrists or head.

In five days, all the hay was cut, and as the drought persisted, they began on the morning of the sixth day to open, and turn over, the cocks which they proposed to put in the barn before night. The scythes had finished their task, and it was now the turn of the forks. They cast down the cocks, spread the hay in the sun, then towards the end of the afternoon, when it was dry, they heaped it up again in piles of the exact size which a man could lift each time to the level of a high cart already half loaded.

Charles-Eugène pulled bravely between the shafts, rushed the cart into the barn, and stopped alongside the mow; once more the forks were thrust into the hard tramped hay, which was lifted in heavy flakes by strength of wrist and back, and unloaded on one side.

At the end of the week all the hay was in the barn, dry and of good colour; the men stretched themselves, and drew long breaths, as if they had emerged from a struggle.

"Now it may rain," said the father Chapdelaine, "it will make no difference to us."

But it appeared that the dry time had not been calculated exactly to their needs, for the wind continued from the north-west, and the sunny days followed in monotonous succession.

With the Chapdelaines, the women did not share in the work of the fields. The father and his three grown boys, all strong and deft, would have sufficed; and if they continued to employ Légaré and pay him wages, it was that he had begun to work for them eleven years ago, when the children were all young; and they now kept him half from habit and half from dislike of doing without so powerful a worker. In the time of haying Maria and her mother had only the usual work: keeping the house, cooking the meals, washing and mending the linen, milking three cows, and caring for the chickens, and once a week baking bread, which often lasted late into the night.

On the evenings for baking, they sent Télesphore to look for the bread pans, which were always scattered in every corner of the house and shed, since they had been used every day to measure oats for the horse, or corn for the hens, not to mention twenty other unexpected uses found for them at every moment. When they were all assembled and cleaned, the dough being already raised, the women hastened through their other tasks the earlier to end their watch.

Télesphore made a fire on the hearth, first with branches of gummy pine that scented the

flame with resin, then with large splits of tamarack which gave a regular and continued heat. When the oven was hot, Maria put in the pans filled with dough; and after that there was nothing to be done but watch the fire and change the position of the pans in the middle of the baking.

The oven had been built too small five years before, and ever since the family never failed talking every week of the new oven it was urgent to build, and indeed must be commenced without further delay; but by some mischance that continually recurred on every trip, they forgot to bring home the required cement; the result was that they had always to use the oven two or three times to furnish a week's supply of bread for the nine mouths in the house. Maria invariably took charge of the first baking; invariably too, when the second batch was ready, and the evening grown late, her mother said to her kindly:

"You can go to bed, Maria. I will watch the second baking."

Maria said nothing. She knew very well that her mother at once went to lie down on the bed with her clothes on, and that she would not wake up until morning. Then she cheerfully revived the smudge made every evening in the old leaky pail; she put the second baking in the oven, and went to sit down on the door-step, her chin in her

hands, preserving through the hours of the night that inexhaustible patience of hers.

Twenty paces from the house, the oven coiffed with its little roof of boards showed dark; the door of the fireplace did not shut close, and allowed a gleam of red light to pass; the black border of the forest approached a little nearer in the night. Maria sat still, tasting the quietude and freshness, and felt a thousand confused thoughts turning round and round about her like a flock of crows.

At other times this watching in the night was only a drowse, and she did not cease hoping that the baking would be finished, and allow her sleep. Ever since François Paradis had come and gone, the long weekly vigil was dear and sweet to her, for she could think of him and of herself without anything to interrupt the course of her happy thoughts. They were most simple, those thoughts, and did not go very far. He would come back in the spring; this return, the pleasure of seeing him again, the words he would say to her when they found themselves once more alone, the first love gestures that would bring them together,—it was difficult now for Maria to picture clearly to herself how all this would come to pass.

However she made the attempt. First, she repeated his entire name, formally, as others would pronounce it,—François Paradis of St. Michel de Mistassini,—François Paradis,—and all at once, intimately—François.

It was a success. There he was before her, with his tall figure and his strength, his face burned by the sun and the glare from the snow, and his hardy eyes. He has come back again, glad to see her, and glad, too, that he has kept his word, that he has lived the whole year as a good boy, without an oath or a drink. There are no more blueberries to pick, for it is the springtime; but they find some good reason for going off together into the woods; he is walking by her side, not touching her or saying a word, through the laurel now beginning to be covered with pink flowers, and this nearness alone is enough to arouse, in both of them, something of fever in their temples, and to pluck at their hearts.

Now they are seated on a fallen tree, and this is what he says:

"Were you lonely for me, Maria?"

That is certainly the first question he will ask; but she can go no further with her dream; when she came to this point she was restrained by distress. O God! How long will she have to be lonely for him, before that moment comes! All the rest of the summer yet to go, and the autumn, and all the interminable winter! Maria sighed, but the infinite patience of her race soon came to her aid, and she began to think of herself and of what all these things meant to her.

When she was at St. Prime one of her cousins, who was about to be married, often spoke to her

on the subject of marriage. A young man of the village and another from Normandin were courting her at the same time, both coming for many a month to spend Sunday evening in the house.

"I liked both of them well enough," she confessed to Maria. "And I was pretty sure it was Zotique I liked the best; but he went away to the drive on the St. Maurice; he would not come back before next summer; then Romeo asked me to marry him, and I said I would. I like him well enough, too."

Maria said nothing, but she thought there must be marriages different from that; and now she was sure of it. The affection François Paradis had for her, and she for him, for example, was something unique, solemn, and as one might say inevitable; for it is impossible to imagine how such a thing could have come to pass in any other way; giving, as it does, continual colour and warmth to the dull life of every day. She always had an obscure intuition that something of this kind must exist; something like the exaltation of the sung mass, like the intoxication of a splendid sunlit and windy day, like the great content arising from a piece of good luck or the certain promise of an abundant harvest.

In the quiet of the night, the murmur of the falls comes near and louder, the wind from the north-west slightly sways the tops of the spruce and firs with a great, fresh, rustling sound that is

good to hear; several times, one after another, and further and further off, the hoot of an owl. The cold preceding the dawn is yet far away, and Maria finds herself perfectly happy, sitting on the door-step, watching the red ray of light flicker, disappear, and shine anew from the bottom of the oven.

It seemed to her that some one a long time ago had whispered to her that the world and life was all a dull affair: the routine of daily toil cut across by pleasures partial and fleeting; the monotonous flow of the years; meeting a young man just like other young men, whose cheerful and persistent courtship ended by making one's heart relent; marriage, and then a long succession of years, each one like the one that went before, in another house. It is like that one lives, the voice said. It is not too dreadful, and in any case one must submit; but it is uniform, dull, cold as an autumn field.

It is not true, all this. Maria shook her head in the darkness with an unconscious smile of ecstasy, as she thought how far it was from being true. When she thought of François Paradis, of his countenance, his presence, of what they are and will be, the one for the other, she and he,—at the same time she shivered and grew hot. Her strong youth, her patience, her innocence converged to this: to this gushing forth of hope and desire, to this prescience of miraculous contentment about to be hers.

At the bottom of the oven the ray of red light flickered, and grew dim. "The bread should be baked," she said.

But she could not at once decide to get up, fearing to break the happy dream that had only begun.

VII

September came, and the dry weather, welcome in haying time, continued and became a calamity. To believe the Chapdelaines, there had never been such a drought, and each day some new reason was suggested to explain the divine displeasure.

The oats and the wheat were yellow before attaining their growth; the continuous sun burned up the grass and the aftermath of clover; and from morning to evening the cows with their heads over the fence bellowed with hunger. They had to be watched without an interval of rest, for even the meagre crop still standing cruelly tempted their desire for food, and not a day went by without one or other breaking the rails in the attempt to satiate themselves in the grain.

Then one evening the wind suddenly shifted, as if exhausted by a constancy so rare, and in the morning the rain fell. It fell at intervals during the week, and when it stopped, and the wind blew again from the north-west, the autumn had come.

Autumn! It seemed as if springtime were only of yesterday. The grain was not yet ripe, only

yellowed by the drought; the hay alone was in the barn; all the other crops came to fruition only by extracting their substance from a soil warmed by the too short summer, and now the autumn was at hand, proclaiming the return of the inexorable winter, the cold, and soon the snow.

Alternating with rainy days still came fine days, bright and warm towards noon, when one might think that nothing was changed: the harvest still unreaped; the eternal spectacle of spruce and fir woods; and ever the same sunsets, mauve and grey, yellow and mauve; the same pale sky above the gloomy land. But in the morning, the grass began to show white with rime, and almost at once the first dry frost came, burning the potato tops and turning them black.

Then the first film of ice appeared on a watering trough; melted in the afternoon warmth, it came again a few days later, and a third time the same week. Frequent changes of wind brought mild rainy days alternating with those frosty mornings; but every time the north-west wind came in afresh it was a little colder, a little more nearly related to the icy blasts of winter. In all places the autumn is melancholy, filled with regret or that which is gone and menace of that which is to come; but on Canadian soil it is more melancholy and more affecting than anywhere else; it is like the death of a human being whom the gods summon too soon, without awarding him his just share of life.

Through the coming cold, the first frosts, the threats of snow, they still held back, and put off from day to day the reaping of the harvest, to allow the poor grain to extract a little more strength from the juices of the earth and from the mellow sun. At last the harvest must be reaped, for October was coming. The oats and wheat were cut, and put in the barn beneath a clear sky; but the work was done without enthusiasm, in the time when the leaves of the birch and the poplar are beginning to turn yellow.

The yield of grain was only middling; but the hay was excellent, so that the year as a whole did not merit either rapture or lament. And yet, the Chapdelaines for a long time in their evening talks never ceased deploring the unusual drought of August and the unusual frosts of September, which had betrayed their hopes.

Against the parsimony of the too short summer and the rigours of a pitiless climate they had no protest, not even bitterness; but in their minds they always compared the past season with some other imaginary season which their illusion made the rule; and it was this brought constantly to their lips that perpetual lament of the peasants, so specious, but recurring year after year, year after year: "If only this had been an ordinary season."

VIII

One morning in October, as she got up, Maria saw the first snow idly falling from the sky in countless flakes. The ground was white, the trees powdered; and it seemed as if the autumn were already finished at a time when in other places it had only begun. But Edwige Légaré said with sententious wisdom:

"After the first snow we have still a month before winter. I always heard the old people say that, and I think so myself."

He was right; for two days later rain melted the snow, and the brown earth appeared again. But the warning was not in vain, and the preparations began: the annual preparations of defence against the great cold and the decisive snow.

With earth and sand Esdras and Da'Bé carefully banked the house, forming a rampart at the foot of the walls; the other men armed with hammer and nails went around the house, making all snug, stopping holes, and doing their best to repair the damage of the year. From the inside the women stuffed rags in the cracks, pasted over the sheathing on the north-west side with old

newspapers brought from the villages and carefully saved, passing their hands in all the corners to discover draughts of air.

This done, all that now remained was to pile up a store of wood for the winter. Beyond the fenced fields at the edge of the forest there was still plenty of dead trees. Esdras and Légaré took their axes and chopped for three days; then the logs were piled ready for a fresh fall of snow, when they could be loaded on the big wood-sled.

All through October, frosty days and days of rain followed in turn, whilst the forest became a wonder of beauty. Five hundred feet from the Chapdelaine's house the bank of the Péribonka river descended abruptly towards the rapid water and the blocks of stone above the fall; across the river the opposite bank rose like an amphitheatre from crag to hillside, from hillside to hills, but an amphitheatre which was prolonged endlessly towards the north. Of the foliage of the birch, of the poplar, of the alders, of the wild cherry, strewn on the slopes, October had made red and yellow masses of a thousand tints. For many weeks the brown of the moss, the steadfast green of fir and pine were nothing more than a background serving only to show off the poignant tints of that other vegetation which was born with the spring and died with the autumn. The splendour of this agony stretched away on the slope of the hills like a ribbon without end, following the water and ever

extending, as beautiful, as rich in soft and brilliant colours, as exciting, away toward the distant regions of the north where no human eye would be cast upon them.

But ere long from the north came a great cold wind like a final judgement, the cruel end of a reprieve; and presently the poor leaves, yellow, brown, and red, too fiercely shaken, lay scattered on the ground; the snow covered them, and the whitened soil knew no other finery than the immutable green of the gloomy trees, which had the best of it, like women of bitter wisdom who give in exchange for everlasting life their claim to beauty.

In November Esdras, Da'Bé, and Edwige Légaré went off to the shanties. The father Chapdelaine and Tit'Bé harnessed Charles-Eugène in the big wood-sled, and with great labour hauled the cut logs, and piled them beside the house. When that was done the two men took the cross-cut saw, and sawed, sawed, from morning to night; then the axes had their turn, and split the blocks according to size. It only remained to pile the split wood in the shed against the house, sheltered from the heavy snow, in huge piles of mingled gummy pine which burns quick with a great hot flame, tamarack and black birch which burn slowly and make a steady fire, and yellow birch close grained and glossy as marble, which burns leisurely and still shows red coals in the dawn after a long winter night.

The time of piling the wood is also the time when one does "la boucherie." After defence against cold comes defence against hunger. The quarters of pork were packed in the salting tub; from a beam in the shed the side of a fine fat heifer was hanging,—the other half had been sold to habitants of Honfleur,—which the cold would keep fresh almost till the spring; sacks of flour were put in a corner of the house, and Tit'Bé took a reel of brass wire, and began to fashion snares to catch rabbits.

A kind of indolence came after the great haste of summer, since the summer is painfully short, and not an hour may be lost of the precious weeks when work can be done on the land, whereas the winter is long, and offers only too much time for its tasks.

The house became the centre of the world, indeed the only portion of the world where it was possible to live; and more than ever the big metal stove was the centre of the house. Quite often some member of the family went under the stairs to fetch two or three blocks, pine in the morning, spruce in the daytime, birch at night, and shoved them on the glowing coals. When the heat seemed to be going down, the mother said with a note of anxiety: "Do not let the fire go out, children."

And Maria, Tit'Bé, or Télesphore opened the little door of the stove, looked in, and hurried off to the pile of wood.

In the morning Tit'Bé jumped out of bed long before daylight, to see if the big sticks of birch had done their duty and burned all night; if by accident the fire had gone out, he very soon lit it with birch bark and pine twigs, heaped big chips on the first flame, and ran back to snuggle under the brown woolen blankets and quilt, waiting for the genial heat to fill the house again.

Out of doors, the near woods and even the fields won from the woods were now only an alien hostile world, which one might survey with interest from the little square windows. At times this world, frozen and still, was of a strange beauty produced by a very blue sky, a shining sun, and scintillating snow; but the equal purity of blue and of white was equally cruel, and gave warning of cold, the murderer.

On other days the weather was milder, and the snow fell thick, concealing everything, the ground and the bushes which it slowly covered, and the dark outline of the forest which disappeared behind the curtain of the serried snowflakes. Next day the sky was clear again; but the wind blew hard from the north-west. The snow, raised in powder, traversed the burnt land and clearings in squalls, and piled up behind any barrier that cut off the wind. At the south-east of the house it formed a high conical pile, and between the house and stable, drifts five feet high, which had to be at-

tacked with the shovel to clear a path; but to windward the ground was scraped bare by the heavy, incessant blast.

On such days the men seldom went out, except to care for the cattle, and they came in at a run, their skin rasped by the cold, moist with crystals of snow that melted in the warmth of the house; the father Chapdelaine pulled away the icicles which had formed on his moustaches, slowly removed his sheepskin lined cap, and took a place near the stove with a sigh of content.

"The pump is not freezing?" he enquired. "Is there plenty of wood in the house?"

Being assured that the frail wooden fortress was provided with water, fuel, and victuals, he then gave himself up to the sloth of winter, smoking countless pipes, whilst the women prepared the evening meal. The cold made the nails in the board wall crack with a sound like the discharge of a gun; the stove filled with black birch wood was roaring; outside the wind stormed and howled like the clamour of a besieging host.

"It must be bad in the woods," Maria was thinking, and she noticed that she had spoken out loud.

"In the woods it is not so bad as here," her father assured her. "Where the trees are thick enough the wind is not felt. I tell you that Esdras and Da'Bé are having no hardship."

"No." It was not to Esdras and Da' Bé she had given the first thought.

IX

Since the arrival of winter, the Chapdelaines often spoke of the holidays, and now the holidays were at hand.

"I wonder if we shall have any visitors on New Year's Day," Madame Chapdelaine reflected one evening. She passed in review all the relations or friends who were likely to come:

"Azalma Larouche lives not far away; but she is too indolent. The St. Prime folks will not make the journey. Perhaps Wilfrid or Ferdinand will come from St. Gédéon if the ice on the lake is good."

A sigh revealed that she was still thinking of the animation in the old parishes at Christmas time, of the family meals, of the unexpected visits of relatives coming by sleigh from another village, buried in fur robes, behind a horse whose coat was white with frost.

Maria was thinking of other things: "If the roads are as bad as they were last year, we can not go to midnight mass. But I would like to go this time, and father promised me."

From the little window she was looking at the grey sky, and grew despondent over the prospect.

To go to midnight mass, that is the natural ambition and great desire of the Canadian habitants, even those who dwell farthest away from the villages. To come, they brave all: the cold, the night in the woods, the bad roads and the long distances add to the solemnity and mystery. The anniversary of the birth of Jesus is for them something more than a date or a rite; it is a renewal of redemption, a cause of great joy; and the wooden church is filled with pure fervour and a supreme sense of miracle. This year, more than ever, Maria was anxious to go to midnight mass, after so many weeks away from houses and churches; it seemed to her that she would have many favours to ask, which would surely be granted if she could pray before the altar in the midst of music.

But about the middle of December snow fell heavily, fine and dry like powder, and three days before Christmas the north-west wind arose, and blotted out the roads.

One day after the storm Samuel Chapdelaine harnessed Charles-Eugène in the big sled, and went off with Tit' Bé, carrying shovels, in an attempt to clear the road or break out a new one. The two men returned at noon, exhausted, white with snow, and said that it would be several days before they could get through.

They must be resigned. Maria sighed, and thought of another means for winning divine benevolence.

"Is it true, mother," she enquired towards evening, that we always receive the favour we ask, when we say a thousand Aves the day before Christmas?"

"It is true," her mother replied quite seriously. "One who has anything to ask, and says properly a thousand Aves before midnight at Christmas—it is very unusual if she does not get what she asks."

The day before Christmas was cold, but calm. The two men went out early to make another attempt to break the road, without much hope; but a long time before they left, indeed a long time before daylight, Maria had begun to recite her Aves. Having awakened very early, she took her rosary from under her pillow, and immediately set to work repeating the prayer very fast, running the last words into the first without a pause, and counting the tale with the beads of her rosary.

All the others were yet asleep; only Chien left his place by the stove when he saw that she stirred, and he crouched beside the bed, with his head resting on the blankets. Maria's eyes ranged over the long white muzzle supported on the brown wool, the moist eyes in which she beheld the pathetic trustfulness of all animals, over the ears falling upon his glossy coat, whilst her lips murmured endlessly the sacred words: Hail Mary, full of grace.

THE OLD PARISH

Very soon Tit' Bé jumped down from his bed to put wood in the stove; with a kind of shyness Maria turned away and hid her rosary under the blankets, but continued to pray. The stove roared; Chien went back to his usual place, and for half an hour more all was still in the house, save Maria's fingers counting the boxwood beads, and her lips, as she prayed without ceasing, like a workman at his task.

Then she had to get up, for day was dawning, to make the porridge and the pancakes, whilst the men went to the stable and cared for the cattle; to serve them when they came in; to wash the dishes and sweep the floor. Whilst attending to these duties Maria never stopped raising, every moment a little higher towards heaven, the monument of her Aves; but she could not use her rosary, and it was hard for her to keep exact count. But when the morning was further on, and no work urgent, she sat down by the window, and performed her task more methodically.

At noon: three hundred Aves. Her anxiety disappeared, for she felt almost sure of finishing in time. It came into her head that fasting would be a further title to divine indulgence and fairly convert hope into certitude; she eat little, and did without the things she liked best.

In the afternoon she had to work at the woolen binder she intended giving to her father for New Year's Day, and although she continued ceaselessly

murmuring the single prayer, the movement of her fingers seemed to distract her and keep her back; then there were the lengthy preparations for supper; after that Tit' Bé came to have his mittens mended, and all this time the Aves proceeded slowly, by starts, like a procession that worldly obstacles obstruct.

But when evening came, the day's work all done, and she could go to her chair beside the window, away from the feeble light of the lamp, in the solemn shade opposite to the fields overlaid with placid white, she took up her rosary and prayed with exaltation. She was happy that so many Aves remained to be said, since toil and trouble would only give the more merit to her enterprise; she even thought of means to further humble herself, and give more efficacy to her prayers, by adopting a position inconvenient or painful, or by some act of penance.

Her father and Tit' Bé were smoking, their feet against the stove; her mother was sewing new thongs to old moose-hide moccasins. Outside, the moon rose, flooding with its cold light the coldness of the white soil, and the sky was of a poignant purity and depth, sown with stars, all resembling the miraculous star of old.

"Blessed art thou amongst women."

By dint of repeating the short prayer at great speed, she became giddy, and stopped, her mind confused, no longer finding the so familiar words.

That lasted only for a moment; she closed her eyes, sighed, and the phrase which arose at once to her memory and was articulated by her lips emerged from the mechanical round, detached itself, and was invested anew with all its precise and solemn meaning:

"Blessed art thou amongst women."

At last a weariness weighed upon her lips, and she uttered the sacred words but slowly and with pains; yet the beads of the rosary continued to slip through her fingers, and each bead sent the offering of an Ave towards high heaven, where Mary, full of grace, surely inclined on her throne, as she heard the music of ascending prayers, recalling in her own memory the blessed night:

"The Lord is with thee."

The rails of the fences made black bars on the white ground bathed in the pale light; the trunks of the birch trees standing out from the border of the dark woods looked like skeletons of living creatures which the cold of the earth had pierced and stricken down; but the frozen night was solemn rather than dread.

"With the roads like this we will not be the only ones forced to stay home to-night," the mother Chapdelaine said. "And yet nothing can be more beautiful than midnight mass at Saint-Cœur-de-Marie, with Yvonne Boilly at the organ, and Pacifique Simard who sings the Latin so splendidly."

She was scrupulous to say not a word that might suggest complaint or reproach on such a night as this; but in spite of that, words and voice equally deplored their distance and solitude.

Her husband surmised these regrets, and touched as he was by the emotion of the holy night began to accuse himself:

"It is quite true, Laura; you would have had a happier life with another than with me, who would have stayed on a good farm near the villages."

"No, Samuel; the good God does all things well. I complain. Of course I do. Who is there that does not complain? But we have never been so badly off,—we two; we have lived, and not suffered too much; the boys are good boys, good workers, and they bring us home nearly all they earn, and Maria is a good girl too...."

They were both affected with tenderness, as they recalled the past, and also thinking of the wax tapers already lit, and of the hymns soon to be raised, celebrating everywhere the birth of the Saviour. Life had always been one and simple for them: the hard compelling work, the complete accord between husband and wife, submission to the laws of nature and of the Church. All these things were blended in the same web, the rites of religion and the incidents of daily life woven together in such a way that they had no power to draw the line between the religious feeling that inspired them and their unspoken tenderness, the one for the other.

Little Alma Rose, hearing the distribution of praise, came to seek her share: "Me, too, I have been a good girl? Have I not, father?"

"Of course, of course. It would be a great sin to be naughty the day the little Jesus is born."

For the children, Jesus of Nazareth was always "the little Jesus," the curly headed babe of the religious pictures; and indeed for the parents too it was that idea the name most commonly evoked: not the dolorous and intellectual Christ of Protestantism, but something more familiar and less imposing; a new-born babe in his mother's arms; or a little later a very little child whom one could love without any great effort of mind, and even without thinking of his future sacrifice.

"Would you like to be rocked?"

"Yes."

He took the little girl on his knee, and began to rock backwards and forwards.

"And are we going to sing, too?"

"Very good; sing with me:

Dans son étable,
Que Jésus est charmant!
Qu'il est aimable
Dans son abaissement.

He began in a low tone, not to drown the child's shrill treble; but very soon his fervour gained control, and he sang in full volume, his eyes far away. Télesphore came and sat down

beside him, and looked upon him with adoration. For these children brought up in a solitary house, without other companions than their parents, Samuel Chapdelaine embodied all the wisdom and all the power of the world, and as he was gentle and patient with them, always ready to take them on his knee, and sing to them hymns or the innumerable artless songs of other days, which he taught them, they loved him with a singular affection:

Tous les palais des rois
N'ont rien de comparable
Aux beautés que je vois
Dans cette étable.

"Again? Very well."

This time the mother and Tit' Bé sang too. Maria could not resist interrupting her prayers for a moment to look on, and listen; but the words of the hymn redoubled her zeal, and she took up her task again with more ardent faith: "Hail, Mary, full of grace."

Trois gros navires sont arrivés,
Chargés d'avoine, chargés de blé,
Nous irons sur l'eau nous y prom-promener,
Nous irons jouer dans l'île.

"And now? Another song; which one?" Without waiting for an answer, he began to sing.

"No, not that one. 'Claire fontaine'? Ah, that is a fine song! Let us all sing together."

He glanced towards Maria; but seeing the rosary which ever slipped through her fingers he refrained from interrupting her.

A la claire fontaine
M'en allant promener,
J'ai trouvé l'eau si belle
Que je m'y suis baigné.
Il y a longtemps que je t'aime
Jamais je ne t'oublierai.

The melody and the words so equally touching; the refrain replete with tender melancholy—it is only to pure hearts this song appeals:

Sur la plus haute branche,
Le rossignol chantait.
Chante, rossignol, chante,
Toi qui as le cœur gai.
Il y a longtemps que je t'aime,
Jamais je ne t'oublierai.

The beads of the rosary ceased slipping through the slender fingers. Maria did not sing with the others; but she listened, and the melancholy love plaint was sweet and soothing to her heart now wearied with prayer:

Tu as le cœur à rire,
Moi je l'ai à pleurer.
J'ai perdu ma maîtresse
Sans pouvoir la r'trouver,
Pour un bouquet de roses
Que je lui refusai.
Il y a longtemps que je t'aime,
Jamais je ne t'oublierai.

Maria looked from the window upon the white fields surrounded by the solemn woods; religious fervour, the uprising of adolescent love, the moving sound of familiar voices were established in her heart as a single emotion. For, in truth, the whole world was filled with love this night, love human and love divine, equally pure and equally strong, and both envisaged as natural and right; they were so blended the one with the other that prayers imploring for loved ones the divine benevolence were little more than manifestations of earthly love; and the artless love plaints were sung with grave and solemn voice and the ecstasy of heavenly invocation:

Je voudrais que la rose
Fût encore au rosier,
Et que le rosier même
A la mer fût jeté.
Il y a longtemps que je t'aime,
Jamais je ne t'oublierai.

"Hail Mary, full of grace."

The song at an end, Maria instinctively resumed her prayers with fresh fervour, and the Aves fell from the rosary like grains from the stalk.

Little Alma Rose was now asleep on her father's knee; she was undressed and put to bed; Télesphore followed her; Tit' Bé, stretching himself, went and filled the stove with green birch wood; the father made a last visit to the stable, came in at a run, and said it was getting colder.

All were soon in bed, except Maria.

"You will not forget to put out the lamp."

"No, father."

She soon put it out, preferring the darkness, and sat down by the window to recite her last Aves. When she had finished, she was seized with a scrupulous fear lest she might have been mistaken in the number, since she could not always keep count on the beads of the rosary. As a precaution she said fifty more, and then stopped, bewildered and weary, but happy and full of confidence, as if she had already received the divine promise.

Outside, the world was all bathed in light, enveloped with the cold splendour night sheds upon snowy lands, when the sky is clear and the moon shines. The inside of the house was dark, and it seemed as if the champaign and the woods were illumined against the coming of the blessed hour.

"The thousand Aves are said," Maria reflected, "but I have not yet asked any favour—not in so many words."

It seemed to her that probably there was no need; that the divinity would understand without a spoken wish, Mary above all, who on earth had been herself a woman. But at the last moment her pure heart was haunted by a fear, and she sought to put in words what she wanted to ask.

François Paradis. Assuredly her desire concerned François Paradis. You have divined it,

Mary full of grace. How could she declare her desire without irreverence? That he should not suffer in the woods—that he should keep his promise to abstain from profanity and drink—that he should return in the spring.

That he should return in the spring.—She stopped at that, because it seemed to her that when he came back, having been true to his word, all the rest of their future happiness was something they could achieve almost by themselves—almost by themselves; that is, if it were not presumptuous to think so.

That he should return in the spring.—Thinking of that return, of himself, of the fine sunburned face turned towards hers, Maria forgot everything else, and looked long with unseeing eyes upon the snow covered ground, which the light of the moon turned into a vast sheet of magical texture, a little of mother of pearl and something of ivory, upon the black fences, and the near border of the formidable woods.

X

It was New Year's Day; and yet this day of all the year brought not a single visitor. Towards evening the mother of the Chapdelaine family, although rather depressed, concealed her gloom under the mask of an excessive gaiety.

"Even if no one comes," she said, "that is no reason why we should be unhappy. We are going to make *la tire*." The children laughed with glee, and watched the preparations with eager interest. Syrup was added to brown sugar, and set to boil. When the mixture was sufficiently cooked, Télesphore brought in a large tin dish filled with pure white snow. They gathered around the table as the mother poured the boiling syrup drop by drop upon the snow, where it gradually congealed in sugary bubbles deliciously cold.

Each was served in turn; the adults of the family playfully imitated the avid appetites of the little ones; but the supply was prudently stopped to preserve a proper taste for the true *la tire* of which the process had only begun. For the finishing

touch must be put to the cookery, and once the mass was ready, it had to be pulled for a long time whilst it was growing hard. The powerful hands of the mother plied incessantly for five minutes, stretching and folding the succulent skein. Little by little the movement slowed down; for the last time the confection was drawn out to the thickness of the finger, when it was cut in pieces with a pair of scissors, not without difficulty, for it was already hard. *La tire* was finished. The children were tasting the first morsels, when a sound of knocking was heard upon the door.

"Eutrope Gagnon," exclaimed the father. "I was just thinking it would be very strange if he did not come to spend the evening with us."

It was Eutrope Gagnon in very truth. He came in. He bade them all a good evening, and placed his woolen cap on the table. Maria looked at him, and blushed. Custom decrees that on New Year's Day the young men shall kiss the girls; and she knew very well that Eutrope, for all his shyness, was going to avail himself of the privilege. She remained seated at the table, and waited without dislike, but thinking of that other kiss she would have loved to receive. However, the young man took the chair that was offered to him, and sat down, but did not raise his eyes from the floor.

"This is the only visit we have had to-day," said Chapdelaine; "but I am sure you have seen

no one either. I was certain you would come to spend the evening."

"Quite right. I would not have allowed New Year's Day to pass without coming. But besides that, I had news I wanted to tell you."

"Yes?"

The eyes of his listeners were turned upon him in mute question, but he continued his lowered gaze.

"By the look of your face I judge that your news is bad."

"Yes," Eutrope replied.

The mother Chapdelaine almost arose from her chair with a gesture of fear. "Not about the boys?" she cried.

"No, Madame Chapdelaine, Esdras and Da'Bé are well—thank God. The news I bring does not come from them at all. It is not about one of your own. It is about a young man whom you know." He paused for a moment, and in a low voice uttered the name — François Paradis.

His eyes rested for a moment upon Maria, and as quickly turned away; but she did not so much as observe his glance of honest sympathy. A heavy silence prevailed in the household and weighed upon the entire universe. All living creatures and all things inanimate remained voiceless, awaiting with anxiety this news which was of such dreadful import, since it concerned the only man in the world who really mattered.

"This is how it happened," Eutrope Gagnon continued. "You may have known that he was foreman in a shanty above La Tuque on the Vermillon river. About the middle of December he suddenly announced to the boss that he was going to spend the holidays here at Lake St. John. The boss objected, and with good reason. If the men take leave for ten or fifteen days in the very middle of winter—that would soon break up the work. He was not willing, and he said so quite plainly; but you know François. He was hard to bid, when he had a notion in his head. He persisted that he had in mind to go up the big Lake for the holidays, and he was going. Then the boss let him go, for fear of losing him, since he was a man of more than usual ability and experience in the woods.

Gagnon spoke with singular ease, deliberately but without seeking for words. It was as if he had prepared his narrative in advance. Maria had an instant thought in the moment of her dread: François wished to come here for the holidays,—to come to me, and a fugitive joy fluttered her heart as a swallow ripples the water.

"The shanty was not far within the woods, only two days journey from the Transcontinental which comes down by La Tuque. But it happened that there had been an accident; the line was not yet repaired, and the trains were not running. I heard all this from Johnny Niquette of St. Henri,

who came from La Tuque two days ago."

"Yes?"

"When François Paradis found out he could not take the train he only laughed and said that, as it was a matter of walking, he would walk all the way, and that he was going to reach the Lake by following the rivers; first the Croche, then the Ouatchouan which falls in at Roberval."

"That is right," said Chapdelaine. "It can be done; I have come that way myself."

"Not at this time of year, Mr. Chapdelaine; certainly not, at this time of the year. Every one down there told François that there was no sense in trying to make such a journey as that in the depth of winter, in the holiday season, cold as it was, with perhaps quite four feet of snow in the woods, and without a companion. But he only laughed at them, and said that he was no stranger in the woods. A little hardship was not going to frighten him. He had decided to go beyond the Lake for the holidays, and where the Indians could travel, he could tramp too. But, you know very well, Mr. Chapdelaine, when the Indians make this journey they travel in company, and have their dogs. François set out alone upon his snow-shoes, with his blankets and provisions on a little sleigh."

Not a word was said to hasten, or to interrupt, the speaker. They listened as one listens to another who tells a story when the climax is at hand, imminent but unknown, like a man who approaches with his face concealed.

"You remember very well how the weather was the week before Christmas. There was a heavy fall of snow and then the north-west wind arose. During the storm it befel that François Paradis was in the *grands brûlés*, where the fine snow is frightfully driven by the wind into heavy drifts. In such a place a man, no matter how strong he is, has little chance when the cold is great, and the storm lasts long. And if you remember, the wind blew for three days on end, and it was sharp enough to cut the face."

"Yes; and then?"

The monologue which the visitor had prepared was not to last much longer, or perhaps he hesitated before pronouncing the inevitable words, and it was only after an appreciable silence that he continued in a low voice:

"He lost his way."

Those who have spent their lives on the verge of the Canadian woods know what that means. Rash men whom an evil fate pursues in the forest, who find themselves bewildered, lost, very seldom come back again. At times a relief party will find their bodies and bring them home in the spring, after the melting of the snow. The very word—*écarté*—in Quebec, and especially in the far northern regions has taken on a peculiar and sinister significance, revealing the danger there is in losing the sense of direction for even a single day in those boundless woods.

"He lost his way," Eutrope Gagnon repeated. The storm overtook him in the *brûlés*, and he stopped for a day. That we know, for the Indians found a shelter of green branches that he had built, and they saw his tracks too. He ventured forth again because he was short of provisions, and was eager to arrive at the end of his journey, I suppose. But the bad weather continued; snow fell; the north-west wind blew hard; probably he could not see the sun nor mark the road, for the Indians say that his footsteps wandered far from the Croche, which he had followed, and went right away towards the north."

No one uttered a word; neither the two men, who nodded their heads as they listened, to signify their complete comprehension of all the details of the tragic adventure, nor the mother whose hands were joined upon her knees, as if in the act of belated supplication; not even Maria herself.

"When the news spread," Eutrope Gagnon continued, "men from Ouatchouan went out in search as soon as the storm had abated. But the snow had covered every trace. They came back and reported that they had seen nothing. That is three days ago. He lost his way."

The listeners came to themselves with a deep sigh of regret. The story was at an end. In very truth there was nothing more to be said. The fate of François Paradis was as mournfully certain as

if he had been buried in the cemetery of St. Michel de Mistassini with the sound of singing and the benediction of priests.

A heavy silence fell upon the household. The father of the family leaned forward with a wry face, his elbows on his knees, dully beating one clenched hand against the other.

"Which shows," he said, "that all of us are only little children in the hands of our Heavenly Father. François was one of the best men in this settlement for living in the woods and finding his way. Strangers hired him as a guide, and he would lead them home without mishap. And there, he himself is lost. We are only little children. There are some who think themselves pretty strong, and suppose they can do without the help of God in the house and on the farm; but in the woods "—He bowed his head, and repeated again in a grave voice:

"We are but little children—little children."

"He was a good man," Eutrope Gagnon insisted, "a real good man, strong and brave, without ill-will to any."

"Quite true; I am not saying that the good God had any reason for sending him to his death—him sooner than any other. He was a good fellow, a faithful workman. I was very fond of him. It just shows... "

"No one ever had anything against him," Eutrope protested with generous obstinacy. "There

was none like him for work, afraid of nothing, and so obliging. All who knew him were his friends. You could not find his match."

He looked straight at Maria, and reiterated with fresh conviction: "He was a good man—no one like him."

"When we were at Mistassini," Madame Chapdelaine began,—"that is seven years ago,—he was only a boy, but strong and very smart, as big as he is now,— I mean, as he was last summer when he came to see us; and always in good humour. One could not help liking him."

As they spoke, they looked straight before them; and yet all they said appeared to be addressed to Maria, as if her secret love were candidly clear to them. But she neither spoke nor moved. Her eyes were fixed upon the little window—its frosted panes blank as a wall.

Eutrope Gagnon soon went away. The family, left to themselves, maintained the silence. At length the father said in a halting voice:

"François Paradis had scarcely any relations; but as we all had an affection for him we might perhaps have a mass or two said. What do you think, Laura?"

"Yes. Three high masses with music; and when the boys come home from the woods in sound health, if that is the will of the good God, three more for the repose of his soul,—the poor boy. And every Sunday we will say a *chapelet* for him."

"He was like all the rest of us," continued Chapdelaine, "not perfect—naturally—but kindly and correct in his life. God and the Blessed Virgin will have mercy upon him."

Silence once more. Maria felt that it was for her sake they had spoken, because they had divined her grief and sought to assuage it; but she could not utter a word either to praise the dead or lament her loss. A hand, as it were, slipped into her throat, and stifled her breath as the climax of the tragic recital disclosed itself to her; and now that hand had penetrated even into her breast and closed firmly upon her heart. The pangs of rending grief in time might come; for the moment there was nothing more than that—the cruel grip of five closed fingers upon her heart.

Other words were spoken. She did not hear. Then there was the usual bustle of the evening, the preparation for bed time; the father going out for a last visit to the stable, and quickly coming in again, his face red with cold, and slamming the door as a swirl of frosty vapour enveloped him.

"Come, Maria," her mother called very gently, and laid a hand upon her shoulder. She arose and went to kneel down with the others for evening prayers. For ten minutes their voices were heard murmuring the sacred words in low monotone.

At the end of the prayers the mother whispered: "Five more Paters and five Aves for the repose of

them upon whom misfortune has fallen in the woods." And the voices were raised once more, this time a little more subdued, with a tremor like unto a sob.

When silence fell, and all had got up from their knees after the last sign of the cross, Maria quickly turned away and went to the window. The frost had made of the panes so many sheets of fretted and opaque glass which obscured the outside world; but she did not even see them, for tears began to flow and blinded her eyes. For a moment she remained at rest, her arms by her side, in an attitude of piteous surrender. Then, of a sudden, her grief became more poignant, and she was stunned. In an aimless way she opened the door, and went out upon the wooden steps.

Seen from the threshold, the world sunk in white sleep was immensely serene; but as soon as Maria was beyond the shelter of the walls, the cold descended upon her with physical force. The far-away border of the forest came suddenly near, like a somber mask behind which a hundred secret tragedies, buried in the earth, cried with the lamentations of a living voice.

She recoiled with a moan of fear, shut the door, and sat down shivering beside the stove. The first stupor of the shock was passing away. Grief had taken on an edge; the hand that grasped her heart set itself to devise new forms of pain, each torture more subtle and more cruel than the last.

How he must have suffered far off there in the snow, she thought, still feeling on her face the swift onslaught of the frozen wind. She had heard, of course, from men over whom a similar fate had hovered, that such a death was painless and sweet, a mere drowsiness; but she could not believe it, and the sufferings that François may have endured, before abandoning himself to the white ground, passed before her mind's eye in a sinister procession.

No need for her to see the spot. Too well she knew the formidable aspect of the great woods in winter, the snow drifted up to the first branches of the firs; the alder bushes almost entirely covered; birches and poplars stripped naked as a skeleton, and shuddering in the frozen wind; the sunless sky above the massed spires of dark green; François Paradis making his way amongst the thick-set trees, his limbs stiff with cold, his skin raw with that pitiless north-west wind, already famished with hunger, stumbling with fatigue; scarcely able to lift his weary feet, his snowshoes catch in the drift and throw him to his knees.

Doubtless, Maria continued to muse, when the storm was over he saw his mistake, knew he was tramping towards the northern wilderness, then turned in the right direction, being a man of experience and native of the woods. But his provisions were almost exhausted, and he suffered torments from the cruel cold. He lowered his head, set his teeth, and strove with the murderous winter,

calling up every reserve of his great courage and strength. He thought of the route he would follow and the distance. He calculated the chance of survival; he had a sudden vision too of a little house, snug and warm, where all would be glad to see him; and of Maria herself who would know what he had dared for her sake, and would lift up to him her trusting eyes filled with love.

It may indeed have been that he fell for the last time quite near to some place of safety, a few yards only from a house or shanty. It often happens that way. Cold, the assassin with his accomplices leaped upon their prey. They stiffened his strong arms. They covered his beautiful frank face with snow. Without kindness, without pity, they closed his daring eyes, and made of his living body a frozen form.

Maria had no more tears to shed; but she shivered and trembled as he must have trembled and shivered before a merciful oblivion overtook him. She pressed close to the stove. Upon her face was an expression of horror mingled with compassion, as if she had it in her power to animate the cold body, and defend that dear life against the assassins of the storm:

"O Christ Jesus," she broke out, "who didst stretch forth Thine arm towards those in need, why didst Thou not scatter the snow with those pale hands of Thine? Why, O Blessed Virgin, didst thou not support him with miraculous help

when he stumbled for the last time? In all the legions of heaven was there found no angel to point the way?"

It was grief that spoke in these reproachful cries, and Maria in her simple heart was afraid that she had sinned in heeding them. Presently she was filled with another fear. It may have been that François Paradis could not strictly keep the promises he had made to her. In the shanties amongst rough men he may have had moments of weakness; may have sworn or profaned the name of the saints, and gone to his death in a state of sin, overwhelmed by the divine wrath.

Her parents had promised at once that they would have masses said. They were so good! Having discovered her secret, how reticent they were! But she too with her prayers might bring comfort to the poor soul in distress. Her beads lay upon the table. She picked them up, and quite naturally it was the words of the Ave that rose to her lips: Hail Mary full of grace.

Had you really any doubt of this girl's piety, mother of the Galilean? Eight days ago she implored you a thousand times, and you did not heed her prayers. They left you unmoved, divinely impassive, whilst fate fulfilled its purpose. Did you suppose on that account that this child would question either your power or your goodness? That would have been to misjudge her. As she sought your protection for a man, so now she

beseeches you, asking pardon for a soul in the same words, with the same humility and boundless faith: Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is Jesus, the fruit of thy womb.

Utterly alone, she cowered above the iron stove, and although the heat of the fire imbued her, she continued to shiver as she thought of the frozen world around, of the deep woods, of François Paradis whom she could not imagine lifeless, and must be so cold in his bed of snow.

XI

One evening in February, Samuel Chapdelaine announced: "The roads are good. If you like, Maria, we shall go to mass at La Pipe on Sunday."

"Very good, father," she assented, but with an air so weary and indifferent that her parents exchanged secret glances over her head.

Country people do not die of love's grief, nor go all their lives branded by its tragedy. They are too close to nature, and perceive too clearly the inevitable domination of the things that count. It may be for this reason that they are sparing of lofty words in describing the emotions. For "love" they prefer "friendship,"—"regret" for "grief," so that they may assign to the pains and joys of the heart a due relation in life, side by side with other cares of more obvious importance, concerning the daily round, the crops and subsistence for the morrow.

Maria never thought for a moment that her life was over, or that the world must be for her a dreary waste, just because François Paradis would

not return in the spring, or not return at all. But she was unhappy, and whilst her grief endured she could not face the future.

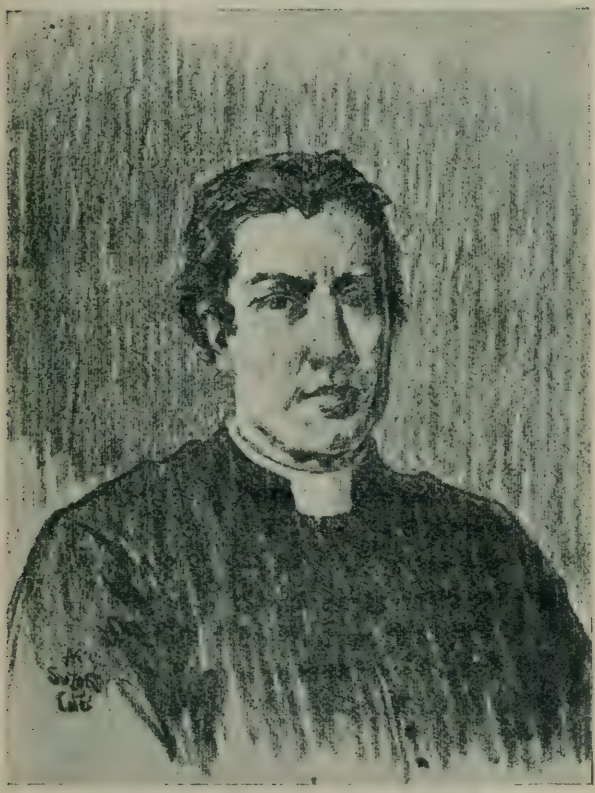
When Sunday came, father and daughter began in good time to prepare for the two hours journey which would bring them to church at St. Henri de Taillon. Before half past seven Charles-Eugène was harnessed; Maria clad in her winter cloak, carefully put in her purse the list of commissions which she was to execute for her mother. A few minutes later the tinkling of sleigh bells was heard, and the rest of the family formed a group at the little square window to watch the travellers on their way.

For an hour the horse could only go at a walk, sinking to his hocks in the snow, for the Chapdelaines were the only ones on the road, which they had laid out and cleared for themselves. It was not sufficiently travelled to make it smooth and hard; but when they came upon the beaten highway Charles-Eugène trotted along merrily.

They passed through Honfleur, a village of eight scattered houses, and entered the woods again. After a time, there were open fields and houses at regular intervals along the road. The somber woods gradually fell into the background, and soon the sleigh was quite in the village, preceded and followed by other sleighs all going towards the church.

Since the first of the new year Maria had been

three times to hear mass at St. Henri de Taillon, which they persisted in calling La Pipe, as in the



THE CURÉ

brave days of the early settlers. It was for her, although an exercise of piety, almost the only

possible distraction; and her father felt obliged to bring her as often as he could in the belief that the unusual ceremonial of religion, and meeting with friends in the village would help to allay her grief.

This time, when mass was finished instead of visiting in friendly houses, they went to the *presbytère*. It was already filled with parishioners from distant farms, for the Canadian priest is not only the spiritual director of his flock; he is their counsellor in all affairs; the composer of their disputes, the only person set apart, to whom they may resort in case of doubt.

The Curé of St. Henri satisfied all who consulted him—some with a few swift words in the midst of a general conversation in which he took a cheery part; others at greater length in the privacy of an adjoining room. When it was the Chapdelaine's turn he looked at his watch.

"Let us have dinner first, my good friend?" he suggested. "You must have found your appetite on the road; and for myself,—to say mass makes me so hungry—you would not believe it."

He laughed with all his strength, more amused than his guests by his own pleasantry, and led the way into the dining room. Another priest was there from a neighbouring parish, and two or three farmers. The conversation was only a long bucolic discussion interrupted by funny stories and bits of harmless gossip. At times one of the farmers,

remembering where he was, would give forth some pious reflection which the priests, a little embarrassed, would receive with a slight nod and a perfunctory "yes—yes."

At length the dinner was over, and some of the visitors departed as soon as they had lighted their pipes. The Curé detected a look from Chapdelaine, and seemed to remember. He arose and made a sign to Maria that she should follow. He went before her into the adjoining room which served him for parlour and office. There was a little organ against the wall; on the opposite side a table with agricultural journals, a Civil Code, some books bound in black leather; on the walls were a picture of Pius X, an engraving of the Holy Family, a coloured calendar showing side by side sleighs and threshing-mills of some Quebec manufacturer, and several official notices explaining the measures to be taken against forest fires or epidemics among cattle.

"So it seems you are worrying yourself: this is not good sense," he said kindly enough, as he turned towards Maria.

She looked upon him with humility, almost believing that with the supernatural power of the priest he had divined her grief without having been told of it. He inclined his huge figure, and bent over her with his meagre peasant face; for under his soutane he had all the characteristics of the tiller of the soil; the gaunt features and yellow

face, the cautious eyes, the large and bony shoulders. Even his hands, dispensers of miraculous pardon, were the hands of a labourer with swoln veins beneath the bronzed skin. But Maria saw in him only the priest, the Curé of the parish, clearly sent by God to expound to her the meaning of life, and show the path she should follow.

"Sit down," he said, pointing to a chair.

She sat down, somewhat like a scholar about to receive a reprimand, somewhat like a woman who consults a magician in his cave, and waits with mingled confidence and fear for the unearthly charms to operate.

An hour later the sleigh was speeding over the hard snow. Her father became sleepy, and the reins were slipping from his open hands. Then he aroused himself, lifted his head, and began in a loud voice to sing the hymn he had struck up as he left the village:

Adorons-le dans le ciel
Adorons-le sur l'autel.

Then he remained silent, his chin falling slowly upon his breast; and the only sound on the road was the tinkle of the sleigh bells. Maria was meditating upon the words of the priest:

"If there was a friendship between you, it is quite natural that you should feel regret. But you were not engaged to be married since you had said not a word to your father and mother,—nor he either. Now, to pine with grief like this, and allow yourself

to suffer on account of a young man who was nothing to you after all,—that is not right, not becoming." And again:

"To say masses for him and pray for him—that is proper. You could not do better. Three high masses with music, and three more when the boys come back from the woods, as your father suggested, naturally that will do him good; and you may be sure he will be better pleased than with vain regrets, for it will lessen by so much the time of his purification. But to distress yourself without cause and shed a gloom over the whole house is neither good sense nor pleasing to God."

In pronouncing these words he did not assume the air of consoler or counsellor, discussing the inscrutable mysteries of the heart; he was like a man of the law or an apothecary definitely enunciating formulæ that were absolute, unfailing.

"A young girl like you, good to look upon, in sound health, strong, and a capable housekeeper,—it is your duty, first, to help your old parents; then, to marry and bring up a Christian family of your own. You have no desire to enter a religious order? No; then you are going to give up tormenting yourself like this, because it is irreligious and wrong, seeing that this young man was nothing to you. God knows what is for our good, and we must neither rebel nor complain."

In all this one single phrase left Maria slightly incredulous. It was the assurance of the priest

that François Paradis in his present state, was concerned only with masses said for the repose of his soul, and thought nothing of the tender and poignant regret of those he had left behind. That she could not bring herself to believe. Incapable of really thinking of him in death otherwise than he had been in life, she believed on the contrary that he must be happy in knowing of this great grief which prolonged a little beyond death a love now of no avail. However, since the priest had said so...

The road wound in and out between the dark trees upright in the snow; the squirrels, alarmed by the swift passing of the sleigh and the sound of bells, leaped upon the spruce trunks and clambered upwards, fixing their claws in the bark. A sudden cold descended from the grey sky upon the white earth, and the wind made their faces burn, for it was February, which in Quebec means two full months more of winter.

As the horse, Charles-Eugène, trotted along the frozen road, and bore the two travellers towards their lonely home, Maria, calling to mind the injunctions of the Curé of St. Henri, expelled from her heart all avowed regret and open grief as completely as she could, and with as much simplicity as she would have resisted the temptation of a dance, an ungodly entertainment, or any other action obviously dishonourable and therefore interdict.

They reached home as the night was falling. The evening was nothing more than a slow fading of the light, for since morning the sky remained overcast and the sun invisible. Sadness weighed down the pallid earth; the balsams and pines did not look like living trees, and the naked birches

LES BRULÉS

seemed to doubt that the spring would ever come again. Maria shivered as she left the sleigh. She yielded scant attention to the barking and gambols of Chien, or even to the children who called to her from the door-step. The world was strangely empty—at least for this evening. Love had gone from her, and grief was forbidden. She went into

the house with great speed, not looking about, for she was feeling a new sensation, part fear and part hatred of the desolate land, the somber forest, the cold, the snow,—all those elements among which she had spent her life; and now they had wounded her.

XII

As March came, one day Tit' Bé brought the news from Honfleur that there would be a large party in the evening at Ephrem Surprenant's, to which they were all invited.

Some one, of course, must stay at home to care for the house, and as Madame Chapdelaine had expressed a desire to make the adventure for the sake of a little entertainment after the long months of seclusion, it was Tit'Bé himself who remained behind. Honfleur, the nearest village to their house was eight miles away; but what was eight miles in a sleigh over the snow through the woods compared with the pleasure of hearing songs and stories, and talking with other people from far distant places?

A large party was assembled at Ephrem Surprenant's house. There were several farmers from the village itself, then the three Frenchmen who had bought the farm from his nephew Lorenzo, and finally, to the great surprise of the Chapdelaines, Lorenzo himself, who had come once more from the United States upon some business connected with this sale and the inheritance from his father.

He welcomed Maria with marked respect, and sat down beside her.

The men lit their pipes. They talked of the weather, the condition of the roads, the news of the county; but the conversation languished, and there was an expectant pause. All eyes were turned towards Lorenzo and the three Frenchmen as if from this simultaneous conjunction must gush forth marvelous tales, accounts of foreign parts and strange customs. The Frenchmen, who had only arrived in the country a few months before, must have experienced a similar curiosity, for they listened, and said very little.

Samuel Chapdelaine, who had met them for the first time, felt free to interrogate them closely, according to the candid Canadian custom:"

"So you have come here to work on the land? How do you like Canada?

"It is a fine country, new, vast. There are, of course, flies in summer, and the winters are hard; but I suppose we will get used to it in time."

It was the father who spoke. The two sons merely nodded their heads, and kept their eyes on the floor. Their appearance was enough to distinguish them from the other residents of the village; but when they spoke the difference was still more marked. Their speech sounded like words in a foreign tongue. It lacked the slowness of the Canadian speech; nor had they that illusive accent which is not the accent of any particular French

province, but merely a peasant accent in which are blended the various modes of former immigrants. They used expressions and turns of phrase which one would never hear in Quebec, not even in the towns, and to those simple men their speech seemed choice and full of refinement.

"In your country, before coming here, were you farmers too?"

"No."

"What trade then did you follow?"

The Frenchman hesitated a moment before he answered, thinking perhaps that the announcement he was about to make would be strange and hard to understand.

"Myself, I was a tuner, a piano-tuner. My two boys here were clerks, Edmond in an office, Pierre in a shop."

Clerks—that was clear enough for any one; but the profession of the father remained a little obscure in the minds of those to whom it was told.

"Tuner of pianos; that's so, exactly so," Ephrem Surprenant repeated, looking at his neighbour, Conrad Néron, with a slightly superior air, and challenge, as if he would say, "You did not want to believe me; or may be you don't know what that means; but now you see... "

"Tuner of pianos," Samuel Chapdelaine repeated in his turn, the sense of the words slowly penetrating his mind. "And is that a good trade? Would you make high wages? Not too good,—what?

But for all that, you are well educated,—you and your boys; you know how to read, and to write, and to cipher? Look at me. I cannot even read."

"Nor me either," Ephrem Surprenant promptly added; Conrad Néron and Egide Racicot spoke at once, "nor me," "nor me," and all broke out in laughter.

The Frenchman made a gesture of vague indulgence, implying that they could very well dispense with those accomplishments which in the present circumstances were of so little use to him.

"Then you could not make a good living at your trades over there?—Yes.—Why then did you come as far as this?" He asked the question in all innocence without any desire to offend, for he was astonished that they should have abandoned for the hard toil of the farm, tasks which to him appeared so easy and pleasant.

Why had they come? A few months earlier they could have absolutely explained their coming with phrases leaping from the heart: weariness of the pavement and street, with the mean air of the town; revolt against the endless prospect of servitude; the moving word, heard by chance from a lecturer preaching with no risk to himself the gospel of force and enterprise, of a life free and healthy on the fruitful soil. All this they could have told with warmth some months ago. Now, the best they could do was an evasive gesture, as they called up any illusion that still remained to them.

"One is not always happy in the town," said the father. "Everything is dear, and life is confined."

In their narrow Parisian abode this idea had appeared to them so marvelous, that in Canada they would pass nearly all their days out of doors, in the clear air of a new country, near the great woods. They had not foreseen the black flies of summer, nor did they fully understand how great was the cold of winter. They never suspected the thousand hardships a pitiless earth could inflict.

"And did you figure to yourself how it was here—the country, the life?" Samuel Chapdelaine persisted.

"Not quite," the Frenchman replied in a hushed voice, "no, not quite." A shadow passed over his face, which made Ephrem Surprenant exclaim:

"Life here is hard. It is hard."

All three said "yes" with nodding heads and lowered eyes: these three men with their narrow shoulders, faces pale in spite of six months on the land, whom a chimera had drawn from their counters, their offices, their piano-stools, from the only life for which they were ever fit; for it is not only peasants who may be torn up by the roots. These Frenchmen were beginning to understand their error. They were so entirely different from the Canadians who surrounded them that they could not live their lives. They had not the strength, the rugged health, the tough fibre; nor

had they that aptitude for every task, which makes of a man a farmer, a forester, a carpenter, according to the season and the hour.

The father shook his head, deep in thought. One of the sons with elbows on his knees contemplated with a kind of wonder the callosities which hard toil in the fields had laid upon the palms of his delicate hands. All three seemed to be turning over and over in their minds the melancholy balance-sheet of failure. Their neighbours said in their hearts, "Lorenzo sold his farm to them for more than it was worth. They have hardly any money. They are badly caught. This kind of people is not made to live on the land."

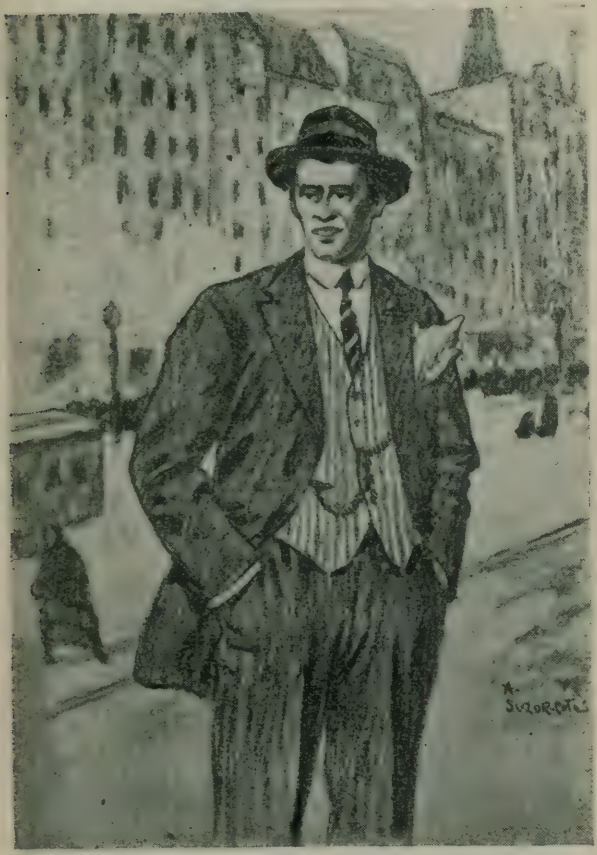
Madame Chapdelaine, partly from pity and partly for the honour of farming, tried to encourage them by saying: "It is a little hard at first when all is strange; but you will see, as your farm improves, that you will make a good living."

"It is queer," Conrad Néron observed, "how hard it is for each one to be content. Here are three persons who left their posts, and came all this way to set up as farmers; and here am I always saying to myself how pleasant it would be, sitting quietly in an office the whole day long, safe from cold or heat, with a pen behind my ear."

"Each one to his own way of thinking," Lorenzo Surprenant decreed with strict impartiality.

"And it was not your idea to remain at Honfleur sweating over the stumps," cried Racicot with a loud laugh.

"That is quite true, and I do not conceal it.



LORENZO SURPRENANT

That would not have suited me. These men here

bought my farm. It is good land. No one can deny that. They wanted to buy a farm, and I sold them mine. But, as for me, I am well enough where I am, and I do not want to come back."

Madame Chapdelaine shook her head. "There is no finer life," she declared, "than the life of a habitant who has good health and is free from debt. He is free; he has no boss, he owns his animals; when he works the profit is for himself alone. Can anything be finer?"

"That is what I hear every one say," Lorenzo replied.—"Free, your own master. And you pretend to pity those who work in factories because they have a boss, and must do what they are told. Free — on the land — let us see." He became excited and spoke with a suggestion of scorn:

"There is no man in the world who is less free than the farmer. When you speak of those who have done well, who are well rigged out with everything needed on a farm, and have better luck than others, what do you say? You say, 'Ah, they live well; they are comfortable; they own fine cattle.'

"I tell you that is not the way to talk. The truth is, their cattle own them. There is no boss in the world so ruthless as a favourite animal. Almost every day they cause you trouble, or do you harm. It is a horse frightened at nothing, that breaks loose and kicks up his heels. It is a cow usually quiet, but when tormented by the flies, she moves off as you are milking her, and tramples

on your toes. And even when they do not injure you by accident, something always happens to disturb your life and exasperate you.

"I know how it is. I was brought up on a farm myself; and you, you are nearly all farmers, and you know how it is too. You have worked hard all the forenoon. You come into the house to dinner and for a little rest; and before you sit down at the table a child comes crying, 'the cows have jumped the fence,' or perhaps, 'the sheep are in the grain.' Everyone gets up and runs, thinking of the oats or barley which cost so much to plant and is now being spoiled by these wretched beasts. The men wave their sticks, and race until they are out of breath; the women run out into the yard and shout. And when you have managed to shut up the cows or the sheep in the pasture, and mended the picket fence, and return to the house well 'rested,' you find the pea soup cold and full of flies, the pork under the table being devoured by the dogs or cats, and you eat anything you can find in haste and fear of some new trick the poor beasts may still be devising.

"You are the slaves of your animals; that is what you are. You tend them; you clean them; you pile up their dung as the poor gather up the crumbs of the rich. It is you who keep them alive by sheer force of labour, because the earth is niggard and the summer too short. That is how it is, and there is no help for it, since you cannot get on without

them. Without animals you cannot live on the land. But suppose you could; suppose you could. You would still have other masters: the summer which begins too late and ends too soon; the winter which eats up seven months of the year without profit; drought and rain which always come at the wrong moment.

"In the cities we mock at these things; but here you have no defence against them, and they work you evil, without reckoning the great cold, bad roads, solitude, far from everything and without amusement. It is misery, misery, nothing but misery from beginning to end. You often hear that only those succeed on the land who are born and brought up on it. That is true. The rest, those who have dwelt in cities—no fear of them being so simple as to content themselves with a life like that."

He spoke with warmth and volubility, like a person of the town, who has daily intercourse with his fellows, reads the papers, and listens to the public speakers. His hearers being of a race easily moved by words felt themselves carried away by his criticism and complaints. The real hardship of their lives was presented to them in a new and startling light which surprised even themselves.

Madame Chapdelaine, however, continued to shake her head. "Don't talk that way," she protested. "There is no finer life than the life of a habitant who has good land."

"Not in this country, Madame Chapdelaine," he continued. "You are too far north; the summer is too short; the grain has hardly time to sprout before the frost comes. Every time I come up here from the States, and see the little wooden houses lost in the wilds so far from one another and with a frightened air, the woods shutting you in on all sides . . . *Batîche*, I am in despair for you, although I no longer live here, and I find myself wondering how it comes about that all you people did not leave these parts long ago, and seek more tolerable homes where you would find all those things that make for an easy life, where you could go out in winter and take a walk without the fear of death . . . "

Without the fear of death . . . Maria gave a swift shudder as she thought of the dread secrets concealed in the green and white of the forest. It was true—what Lorenzo Surprenant said. It was a country without pity, without grace. All the enmity and menace of the outer world, the cold, the deep snow, the solitude, seemed of a sudden to enter into the house and sit around the stove like a swarm of evil spirits with jeering prophecy of disaster, or in a silence that was more dreadful still.

"You remember, my sister," the voices said, "the men, brave and well-beloved, whom we have slain and concealed in the woods. Their souls have escaped us; but their bodies, their bodies, their

bodies,— none shall ever snatch them from our hands."

The wind against the corners of the house howled in derisive laughter, and it seemed to Maria that all who were assembled there between the walls of wood huddled with bent backs and lowered voices, as they whose life being threatened go in fear.

Over the rest of the evening a spirit of sadness hovered; at least it seemed so to her. Racicot told hunting stories,—of bears taken in a trap; they would struggle and roar so fiercely at the sight of the trapper that he would quake with fear; but when they saw the hunters come in force, aiming murderous guns, they would give themselves up, hiding their heads between their paws, and bewailing their fate with cries and groans so piercing and piteous that they were almost human.

After the hunting adventures came stories of ghosts and apparitions; recitals of frightful phantoms or awful warnings delivered to men who had blasphemed, or spoken ill of the priests. And after that, as no one consented to sing, they began to play cards. The conversation sank to less moving themes, and all that Maria remembered as she drove home with the family in the sleigh was Lorenzo Surprenant speaking of the United States and the splendour of the great cities, of the secure and pleasant life, of the fine straight streets, in the evening flooded with light. There was no end to these marvelous spectacles.

Before she left, Lorenzo had said to her in a low voice, almost in confidence: "To-morrow is Sunday, I shall go to see you in the afternoon."

A few short hours of night, a morning of sun upon the snow; and here he was again by her side, taking up the thread of his strange recital as if he were a pleader interrupted in his argument. For it was to her he had been speaking the evening before. Maria understood that clearly. The marked scorn of rural life, his description of the glorious adventure of the cities, this was only the preface to a temptation, and now he would place before her eyes every aspect of it, as one turns over the leaves in a book of pictures.

"O Maria," he began, "you cannot imagine.—The stores in Roberval, the grand mass, a dramatic entertainment in the convent, that is all of beauty you have yet seen. Well, at all these things they who dwell in cities would only laugh. You cannot imagine . . . Nothing to do of an evening when work is done but walk on the pavements of wide streets, not the little plank foot-paths as in Roberval but fine sidewalks of asphalt, level as a table and wide as a room; nothing but just to walk, with the lights, with the electric cars that run continually, with the stores, the crowds of people; you would see sights that would astonish you for weeks at a time. All the pleasures you could have: the theatre, the circus, the illustrated papers, and in every street places one can enter for a nickel,

five cents, and remain for two hours to laugh or cry. O Maria, to think that you do not even know what the moving pictures are!"

He was silent for a moment, reviewing in his memory the amazing spectacle of the cinematograph, and wondering if he could explain and recount to her the usual incidents of it;—the touching stories of young girls abandoned or lost, whose life is condensed on the screen into twelve minutes of atrocious misery and three minutes of heavenly recompense in a salon of exaggerated luxury; the frenzied galloping of cow-boys in pursuit of Indian ravishers; the frightful fusilade; the final rescue of the captives at the last moment by the soldiers who come upon the scene like a whirl-wind, triumphantly waving the star spangled banner. After a slight hesitation he shook his head, recognizing his incapacity to describe such events in mere words.

They walked together on snowshoes over the burned areas that extend along the high bank of the river Péribonka above the falls. Lorenzo Surprenant used no pretext for arranging that Maria should go out with him; he just asked her quite openly, and now he spoke to her of love with the same direct and practised simplicity:

"The first day I saw you, Maria, the very first day . . . I mean it. It was a long time since I had been back to the country, and I was saying to myself that it was a miserable place to live; that

the men seemed like a lot of simpletons who had seen nothing; and that the girls were not at all so bright and smart as they are in the States . . . And then, just by setting eyes on you, I knew in an instant that it was I who was the fool, since I had never seen a girl like you either in Lowell or in Boston. When I went down there again I used to think ten times a day that some uncouth habitant would find you and carry you off, and each time I would go cold. It is for you I have come back, Maria,—came here all the way from near Boston, three days journey. The business I had I could do by letter; it is for you I came, to tell you what I had to say, and hear what you have to answer."

As often as there was before him a few feet of bare ground free of stumps and roots, where he could raise his eyes without danger of stumbling in the snow, he looked at her, but he saw only the profile of her inclined face with its patient and tranquil expression between the woolen cap and the long woolen jacket that outlined her vigorous form, so that each glance recalled to him the reasons for his love without bringing any reply.

"Here is no place for you Maria," he went on. "The country is too hard, the work hard too. Just to gain one's daily bread is enough to kill a person. Down there in the factories, clever and strong as you are, you would soon earn nearly as much as I do; but if you were my wife you would have no need to work. I earn enough for two.

We would live a fine life, with good clothes, a pretty flat in a house of brick, with gas, hot water, and all kinds of convenience that you have no idea of, to spare you trouble and discomfort at every turn. And do not suppose that there are only English down there. I am well acquainted with several Canadian families who work like me, or even have stores of their own. And there is a fine church with a Canadian priest, Curé Tremblay from St. Hyacinthe. You would not be lonely . . . "

He paused again. He cast his eyes around him on the white earth, studded with brown stumps, on the austere plain which a little farther along fell away in a single slope to the frozen river, as if he were in search of some decisive argument.

"I do not know what more to say . . . You have always lived here. You cannot imagine life in other places, and I cannot explain to you in words alone. But I love you, Maria. I earn good wages, and I never take a drink. If you are willing to marry me, as I ask, I will take you into surroundings that will astonish you, really beautiful and not at all like this, where we can live like decent people, and make a happy home."

Maria remained silent, and yet every phrase that Lorenzo Surprenant uttered was beating on her heart as a wave beats on the shore. It was not the protestations of love that touched her, although they were honourable and sincere, but the descriptions by which he sought to tempt her. It

was only of vulgar pleasures he spoke, the trivial accessories of comfort or of vanity. But it should be remembered that these were the only things she could completely comprehend, and that all the rest—the mysterious magic of the city, the attraction of a life different, unknown, at the very centre of the human world and no longer on its extreme confines, had all the greater force from remaining so vague and impalpable, like a far-away and shining light.

All that was strange and intoxicating in the spectacle and contact of multitudes, all the swarming wealth of sensations and ideas, which is the lot for which the city dweller has traded the eager pride of the earth,—Maria envisaged all that confusedly like a new life in a new world, a glorious transformation for which she was homesick in advance. But above all she had a great desire to go away.

The wind blew from the east and drove before it a mass of dark clouds laden with snow. They filed past in menace above the white earth and the somber woods; the passive earth seemed to await another layer to its winding sheet, and the fir, the spruce, the pine trees arrayed the one against the other did not stir; they were fixed in that appearance of great resignation borne by all trees having upright stems. The stumps emerged from the snow like broken wreckage. Nothing in the landscape spoke of a possible springtime or of a

future season of heat and fruitfulness; it was rather the segment of a forsaken planet, where nothing but cold death reigned.

This cold, this snow, this sleeping country, the austerity of the somber trees Maria Chapdelaine had known all her life; and now for the first time she thought of them with distrust and fear. What a paradise those countries to the south must be, where winter ends in March, and in April the leaves are showing. In the depth of winter one can walk on the roads without snowshoes, without furs, far from the savage forest. And in the towns, the streets . . .

Questions were trembling upon her lips. She had wished to know if there were tall houses and shops in unbroken line on both sides of the streets, as she had been told; if the electric cars ran all the year; if living was very expensive . . . And the replies to all these questions had satisfied only a trivial part of her awakened curiosity, and left almost intact the marvelous outline of the great illusion.

She remained silent, yet in fear lest she might utter a word that might resemble the beginning of a promise. Lorenzo gazed intently upon her as he walked by her side across the snow, and divined nothing of the thoughts in her heart.

"You are not willing, Maria? You have no affection for me, or possibly you can not yet make up your mind?" As she spoke not a word, he seized

upon the latter of these alternatives, unwilling to risk a definite refusal.

"There is not the slightest need for you to say 'yes' at once. You have not known me very long. Only think of what I have told you. I shall come back, Maria. It is a long and expensive journey; but I will come. And if you give the matter sufficient thought, you will see that there is not a young man in the country with whom you could make such a career as with me, since if you marry me, we shall live as people ought to live, instead of killing ourselves by caring for cattle and scratching the earth in these desolate places."

They regained the house. Lorenzo talked for a while of the journey before him, of the States where he would find the spring already come, of the abundant and profitable employment, to which his elegant apparel and easy manner bore ample witness. Then he went away, and Maria who had sedulously turned aside her eyes from his gaze sat down near the window; and looking out upon the night and the snow that were falling in company she meditated upon her great loneliness.

XIII

No one asked any questions of Maria, either that evening or the evenings following; but some member of the family must have told Eutrope Gagnon about the visit of Lorenzo Surprenant and of his obvious intentions, for next Sunday, after the midday meal, Eutrope came in his turn, and Maria heard a second declaration of love.

François Paradis had come in the heart of summer, descending from those mysterious regions which are situated "en haut des rivières." The memory of the very simple words he had pronounced was all blent with remembrance of a great shining sun, ripe blueberries, the last flowers of the laurels fading away in the thicket. After him Lorenzo Surprenant had supplied another mirage, the mirage of far-away cities and the life that he offered, rich with hidden wonders. Eutrope Gagnon, when he came to speak, spoke with timidity, with a kind of shame, as if he were discouraged in advance, knowing that he had nothing to offer, that had any power to tempt her.

Quite boldly he asked Maria to come for a walk with him; but when they had put on their coats

and opened the door, they saw that the snow was falling. Maria stopped on the platform, hesitating, one hand on the latch, as if she were about to return to the house; and he, fearing to allow the opportunity to pass, began to speak at once, and in haste, as if he doubted his power to say all he desired to say:

"You know well enough, Maria, that I have an affection for you. I have not spoken to you about it before this; first, because my farm was not far enough along for both of us to live there as we ought; and after that, because I guessed it was François Paradis you liked better. But since he is dead now, and this other fellow from the States is after you, I said to myself that I too might as well try my luck"

The snow by this time was falling in thick flakes; it tumbled down from the grey sky, fluttering white against the enormous dark background formed by the face of the forest, and then went to unite with that other snow which five months of winter had already heaped upon the earth.

"I am not rich—that is true enough; but I have two lots of my own, all paid for; and you know it is good land. I am going to work on it all the spring, stumping the big fields below the ridge, making good fences; and when May comes I shall have a large part of it ready for seeding. I will sow a hundred and-thirty bushels, Maria, a hundred and-thirty bushels of wheat, barley, and oats without

counting an acre of feed for the cattle. All of this grain, fine seed grain, I shall buy at Roberval, and pay cash on the counter; that is so . . . I have the money laid aside all ready; I will pay cash with not a cent of debt to any one; and if only it is an ordinary season, that will yield a fine crop. Think of it, Maria, a hundred and-thirty bushels of fine seed grain in good land. And in the summer, before the haymaking, and again between the haymaking and the harvest, that is the proper time for building a nice little house, warm and solid, all of red spruce. I have the lumber ready, cut and piled behind my barn. My brother will help me, and perhaps Esdras and Da'Bé too, when they come home. Next winter I will go up to the shanties with a horse, and I will return in the spring with not less than two hundred dollars clear in my pocket. Then, if you were at all willing to wait for me, that would be the time . . ."

Maria remained leaning upon the door, one hand on the latch, with averted eyes. That was all Eutrope Gagnon had to offer her: to wait a year, then become his wife, and continue her present life in another wooden house, on another half cleared farm; to do the household work and the cooking, to milk the cows, clean the stable when the man was away, work in the fields perhaps, since there would be only the two of them, and she was strong; to pass the evening at the wheel or mending old clothes; to take an occasional half

hour's rest in the summer, sitting on the door-step, in face of a few fields shut in by the enormous dark woods; or again, in the winter to melt with her breath a little space on the window pane opaque with frost, and watch the snow falling upon the fields already white, and upon the woods.—The woods—always the woods, impenetrable, hostile, full of sinister secrets, closed round them like a cruel fist which must be opened little by little, little by little, year by year, gaining a few acres every spring and every autumn; year by year, throughout a long, dull, hard life. No, she was not willing to live such a life as that.

"I know well enough we should be obliged to work hard in the outset," Eutrope went on, "but you are brave, Maria, and accustomed to work; and I am too. I have always worked hard; no one could ever say that I was lazy; and if you were willing to marry me, it would be a pleasure for me to toil like an ox all day long, to make for you a good farm where we might be at ease before we grew old. I do not drink, Maria, and I would love you well."

His voice shook, and he too stretched out his hand towards the latch, perhaps indeed to take her hand in his, perhaps to prevent her from opening the door and going in before she should give her answer. "The affection I have for you,—it cannot be told."

She uttered never a word in reply. For the second time a man spoke to her of love, and placed in her

hands all he had to bestow, and for the second time she listened and remained speechless, embarrassed, only saving herself from gaucherie by stillness and silence. The young girls of the towns would have considered her silly; but she was only simple and sincere, and close to nature, which does not deal in words. In other days, before the world had become so complex as at present, no doubt the young men, half bold and half afraid, approached a girl with broad hips and powerful chest to offer and demand; and on every occasion when nature had not yet spoken the imperious word to the girl, doubtless she listened in silence, lending an ear less to their declaration than to the inner voice, and preparing that gesture of aloofness which would defend her against every too ardent a summons, whilst she waited.

Maria Chapdelaine's three lovers had not been attracted by her facile or gracious words, but by the beauty of her body and by the presentiment they had of her limpid and honest heart; when they spoke to her of love she remained true to her nature, patient, calm, silent,—so long as she found nothing needful to be said, and they loved her all the more for it.

"This fellow from the States has been making fine speeches, but you must not be taken in." He surmised the indication of a gesture of protest, and said more humbly: "Oh, you are quite free,

naturally; and I have nothing to say against him. But you would do better, Maria, to remain here amongst your own people."

Through the falling snow Maria observed the unique fabric of planks, half stable and half barn, which her father and brothers had built five years before, and she found in it an aspect at once repugnant and mean, now that she had begun to figure to herself the marvelous edifices of the city. The interior hot and fetid, the floor covered with manure and dirty straw, the pump in the corner, hard to work and grinding at every stroke; the outside squalid, assailed by the cold wind, buffeted by the incessant snow,—this was the symbol of all in store for her if she became the wife of a man like Eutrope Gagnon, a life of gross labour in a country mournful and wild.

She shook her head: "I cannot say anything to you, Eutrope, neither yes nor no; not now. I have promised no one. You must wait."

This was more than she had said to Lorenzo Surprenant, and yet Lorenzo had gone away full of assurance; and Eutrope felt that he had tried his luck and lost. He went alone across the snow, whilst she went into the house.

March dragged itself along in melancholy days; a cold wind drove the grey clouds back and forth across the sky or scoured the snow; one had to study the calendar, the gift of a grain merchant at Roberval, to be convinced that spring was coming at all.

The days that followed were for Maria just like the days that went before, bringing the same tasks performed in the same way; but the evenings were different, filled by an effort of pathetic thought. No doubt her parents had guessed what had taken place; but respecting her silence they offered no advice, and she did not seek it. She knew in her conscience that it belonged only to her to make her choice and decree her life; and she felt like a pupil standing upon the platform before searching eyes, and bidden to solve without help a difficult problem.

It was like this: when a girl arrived at a certain age, good to look upon, healthy and strong, accustomed to all the duties of house and field, young men asked her to marry them. And she had to say "yes" to this one, "no" to another.

If François Paradis had nòt lost his way without return in the vast and desolate woods, all would have been easy. She would not have had to ask herself what she ought to do. She would have gone right to him, driven by a wise and imperious force, as sure of doing right as a child who obeys. But he was gone; he would not return as he had promised,—neither in the spring nor at any later time, and the Curé of St. Henri had forbidden her to continue the long expectation by a long regret.

O God! What a marvelous time the beginning of this expectation had been! Something swelled up and opened in her heart from week to week, as a splendid rich sheaf whose spreading stalks

bend forward, and a great joy came dancing towards her. No, it was more vigorous and stronger than that. It was like a great luminous flame beheld in a gloomy world at twilight, a shining promise towards which one marched, forgetful of the tears that had been about to flow, and saying with an air of defiance, "I was sure,—I was sure there was somewhere in the world a thing like that."

Finished.—Yes, it was finished. Now she must pretend that she had seen nothing, and with hesitating steps laboriously seek her way in a melancholy world devoid of illusion.

Her father and Tit' Bé smoked in silence by the stove; her mother was knitting socks; Chien, lying on his belly, his head between his out-stretched paws, slowly winked his eyes, enjoying the pleasant warmth. Télesphore had fallen asleep, his catechism open upon his knees; and the little Alma Rose, who was still awake, had already hesitated for several minutes between a great desire to remark upon the inexcusable idleness of her brother and shame at committing such a betrayal.

Maria lowered her eyes, took up her work, and followed a little further still the leading of her obscure and simple thought. When a girl does not feel, or no longer feels, the great mysterious force that impels her towards a man who is different from others, what is there to guide her? What should she seek in marriage? Surely to have a fair life, to make a happy career...

Her parents would have preferred that she marry Eutrope Gagnon—she was aware of that—first, because by so doing she would remain near to them, and again because life on the land was the only one they knew, and they naturally imagined it to be superior to all others. Eutrope was a good fellow, strong and quiet, and he loved her; but Lorenzo Surprenant loved her too; he was equally sober and industrious; at heart he remained Canadian quite as much as those amongst whom she lived; he went to church; and he carried for her as a splendid gift a dazzling world, the magic of the city; he would deliver her from the dejection of the frozen country and the gloomy woods.

She could not make up her mind to say to herself, "I am going to marry Lorenzo Surprenant." But in truth her choice was made. The murderous north-west wind which had buried François Paradis under the snow at the foot of some melancholy cypress had in that very act made Maria to feel all the gloom and severity of the country in which she lived, and inspired her with a hatred of the northern winters, of the cold, of the white ground, of the solitude, of the vast, inhuman forests where all the trees bear the aspect of trees in a cemetery. Love, true love, had passed close to her,—a great flame, hot and clear, which had forsaken her, never to return. There yet remained an intense longing for it, and now she was impelled to desire as a compensation and a cure the brilliancy of a distant life in the wan splendour of the cities.

XIV

One evening in April Madame Chapdelaine refused to take her place at the supper-table with the family.

"I am sick all over," she said, "and I am not hungry. I think I strained myself to-day, lifting the bag of flour to make bread. Now I feel something in my back that hurts, and I am not hungry."

Not a word was said. They who live a life of ease are quick to disquiet themselves when the human mechanism of any one goes wrong; but those who live on the land consider it quite natural that occasionally their hard toil should subdue them, and some fibre of the body break. Whilst the father and children were eating, Madame Chapdelaine remained quiet on her chair beside the stove. She rather gasped for breath, and her heavy face quivered.

"I am going to bed," she soon announced. "A good night's rest, and in the morning I shall be as well as ever. You will look after the baking, Maria."

In the morning, however, she arose at her usual hour, but as soon as she had prepared the batter

for the pancakes, pain seized her, and she had to lie down again. Beside the bed she rested for a moment, holding her sides with her hands, and made sure that the tasks of the day would be done.

"You will give the men their meals, Maria. And your father will help you to milk the cows, if you like. I am good for nothing this morning."

"Very well, mother; very well; rest quietly. We will not suffer."

For two days she lay prostrate, but from her bed she supervised the domestic routine, and gave advice.

"Do not distress yourself," her husband kept repeating incessantly. "There is really nothing but the cooking to be done in the house. For that Maria is quite capable, and for the other work as well; *batêche*. She is no longer a child. She is as competent as yourself. Keep quiet; rest comfortably, instead of tossing about under the blankets, and making yourself worse."

On the third day she ceased thinking of household cares, and began to complain.

"O God," she moaned, "I have pain all over my body, and my head burns. I am going to die."

"You will die when the good God wills that you shall die," Chapdelaine cheerfully strove to comfort her; "and that, it seems to me, will not be for a long time yet. What would He do with you? Heaven is full of old women; here we have

only one, and she is still useful—at times." But he began to be alarmed, and took counsel with his daughter.

"I shall harness the horse, and drive to La Pipe," he proposed. "Perhaps in the shop they have some medicine for this sickness, or I might talk to the Curé, and he would tell me what to do."

Before they had taken a decision night had come, and Tit'Bé who had gone to help Eutrope Gagnon sawing fire-wood returned, and brought him with him.

"Eutrope has a cure," he said. They crowded around Eutrope who took from his pocket a little tin box, and opened it slowly.

"This is what I have," he said with rather a doubtful air. "They are pills. When my brother was bad with kidney trouble three years ago, he read in the paper an advertisement for these pills, which claimed that they were good. Then he sent the money for a box. He says it is a good remedy. Of course his sickness did not leave him at once; but he says it is a good remedy. It comes from the States."

For a time they considered in silence the little grey pills that rolled here and there on the bottom of the box, a remedy—prepared by some man of scientific repute in a far country. The same fearsome respect impressed them as the Indians experience over a decoction of herbs boiled by night at the full of the moon, over which the

medicine man of the tribe had recited his magical incantations.

"Is it only in the kidneys the trouble is?" Maria asked in a doubtful voice.

"From what Tit'Bé told me I thought so."

"She hurt herself lifting a bag of flour," Chapdelaine said with an evasive gesture. "At least that is what she told me; and now she is sick all over. We cannot say."

"The paper that told of this remedy," Eutrope Gagnon continued, "said that when any one fell sick, and was suffering, the trouble was always in the kidneys; and for the kidneys these pills are just the thing. The paper said so, and my brother too."

"But even if it was not exactly for this illness," Tit'Bé affirmed with an impressive air, "it is a remedy in any case."

"She is suffering,— that is sure. We cannot leave her like this."

They came to the bed where the sick woman groaned and breathed with difficulty and tried at times to make slight movements which were followed by signs of more severe suffering.

"Eutrope has brought you a remedy, Laura."

"I have no faith in your remedies," she protested between two attacks of pain. But she looked with interest upon the grey pills that rolled about in the tin box, as if they were moved by a supernatural life.

"My brother took them three years ago when he had kidney trouble so bad that he could hardly work, and he says they did him good. It is a fine remedy, Madame Chapdelaine, — sure." As he spoke, his previous hesitation vanished, and he felt himself filled with entire confidence.

"This is going to cure you, Madame Chapdelaine, as sure as there is a God above us. It is a first class remedy. My brother got it from the States on purpose. You would not find a medicine like it in the store at La Pipe."

"It will not make her worse, will it?" Maria asked with a haunting fear. "It is not a poison, is it?—or anything like that?"

"Do her harm? — little pills no bigger than that," the three men protested in one voice and almost with indignation.

"My brother took a whole box of them, and he says it is good they did him."

When Eutrope went away, he left the pills behind. The sick woman had not yet consented to take them, but her resistance decreased each time they were pressed upon her. At midnight she swallowed two, and two more in the morning. During the hours that followed they all awaited with confidence until the magic of the medicine should assert itself. But towards midday they had to face the facts. She suffered just as much, and continued to complain. By evening the box was empty; and when night fell the moans

of the sick women filled the household with a sad distress, especially now that they had no more of the remedy in which they could place their hope.

Maria got up two or three times, aroused by the more bitter plaints. Each time she found her mother in the same position, lying on her side in a state of immobility which seemed to cause her suffering, and made her a little more rigid hour by hour; and always her grievous lamentation.

"What is it, mother?" Maria asked. "Are you better?"

"O God, how I suffer, how I do suffer," was her answer. "I cannot move any more, and it hurts just the same. Give me some cold water, Maria, I am dying of thirst."

Several times Maria gave her a drink, but at length she was full of fear: "Perhaps it is not good for you to drink so much, mother. Try and bear the thirst for a little."

"I cannot bear it, I tell you,—the thirst, and then the pain I have in my whole body; and my burning head. O my God, I am surely dying."

A little before daylight both of them fell asleep; but Maria was soon awakened by her father who shook her by the shoulder, and spoke in a low voice.

"I am going to harness," he said. "I am going to drive to Mistook for the doctor, and on the way through La Pipe I shall speak with the Curé as well. It is frightful to hear her moaning in this way."

With her eyes open in the dim light of dawn Maria lent her ears to the sound of his departure: the stable door banging against the wall; the thud of the horse's hoofs upon the planked passage; the lusty cries, "Ho la—Harrié—Harrié donc—Ho"—Then the sound of sleigh-bells. In the silence that followed, the sick woman moaned two or three times without waking. Maria watched the pale day fill the house, and she thought of her father's journey, as she compelled herself to reckon the distance.

From their house to the village of Honfleur it was eight miles; from Honfleur to La Pipe six. At La Pipe her father would speak with the Curé, and would then continue his journey towards Mistook. She corrected herself, and instead of the old Indian name the people always used, she gave to the village its official name, the name given to it in baptism by the priests, Saint-Cœur-de-Marie. From La Pipe to Saint-Cœur-de-Marie eight miles more; eight and six, and eight more. She was bewildered, and said in a low voice, "It is a long distance in any case; and the roads will be bad."

Once more she felt a tragic fear in thinking of their solitude for which she used to care so little. It was very well when all the world was strong and happy, and one had no need of help; but let a little trouble come, sickness, and the surrounding woods seemed to shut them up in a hostile

fist, to deprive them of outside help,—the woods and its accomplices, bad roads where the horses would sink to their breasts, and snowstorms full in the month of April.

The mother tried to turn over in her sleep. She awoke with a sharp cry of pain, and began to moan without respite. Maria arose, and went to sit down beside her, thinking of the long day which had only begun, and that during its course she would have neither advice nor help.

This day was nothing more than a long complaint, an endless moan that came from the bed where the woman lay sick, and haunted the little house of wood. From time to time this lamentation was mingled with domestic sounds, the rattle of plates and dishes, the door of the cast-iron stove opening with a clang, footsteps on the floor, Tit'Bé quietly entering the house, anxious and awkward, to hear the news.

"Is she not any better?"

Maria shook her head. They remained, both of them, motionless for a few minutes, regarding the still form beneath the brown woolen blankets, and listening to the sounds of suffering. Tit'Bé went out once more to attend to his trivial tasks. Maria finished putting the house in order, and resumed her patient watch which at times was broken by the more piercing groans, as if they were voices of reproach.

From hour to hour she renewed her calculation of time and distance: "My father ought to be near Saint-Cœur-de-Marie. If the doctor is there, they will allow the horse to rest for a couple of hours, and then set out together. But the roads must be bad; in the springtime with such weather as this they are sometimes quite impassable." A little later:

"They should have started. It may well be that in passing La Pipe they will stop to speak with the Curé; or the Curé may even come as soon as he knows, without waiting for them. He may arrive at any moment."

But the night approached, and brought no one. About seven o'clock bells were heard outside. Her father and the doctor had arrived. The doctor came into the house alone. He put his bag on the table, and began to take off his great-coat, grumbling all the while:

"With the roads as they are, it is no small thing coming to see the sick. And you,— you have concealed yourselves in the woods apparently as far away as you could. *Batêche*, you might all die, and no one come to your aid." He warmed himself for a few moments at the stove, and then went to the bedside.

"And so the mother takes it into her head to be sick, just like those who can afford it." But after a cursory examination he ceased his pleasantry.

"She is sick all right,— upon my soul."

"It was not from affectation he spoke like the

THE DOCTOR

habitants. His grandfather and his father had worked on the land, and he had only left the country to study medicine in Quebec along with

other young men who were mostly of his own kind, grandsons, if not sons, of farmers, who had all retained the frayed manners of the hamlet and their slow ancestral speech. He was tall and powerful with grey moustaches; and his heavy face had a constrained expression, as of good humour stopped short by the conveyance to others of ill news in which he felt bound to give an appearance of sympathy.

Chapdelaine having unharnessed, and cared for his horse, came into the house. He sat down at a respectful distance with the children, whilst the doctor performed his rites.

"Now we shall know what is wrong, and he will give her the proper remedies," they all were thinking.

But when the examination was at an end, in place of having instant recourse to the philters in his bag he hesitated, and began to ask questions without end.—How had it commenced; of what did she complain the most; had she suffered from a previous attack of the same kind. The replies did not seem greatly to illumine his mind, and he turned to the sick woman herself, but obtained from her only vague indications and expressions of pain.

"If it is nothing more than a strain she has given herself," he said at length, "she will get wel if she is left alone. She has only to stay in bed without moving. But if it is an internal lesion, in

the kidneys or elsewhere, that may be serious." He felt in a confused way that his condition of uncertainty disappointed the Chapdelaines, and he desired to reestablish his prestige:

"Internal lesions—that is grave; and one can see nothing. The most learned doctor in the world could not tell more about it than I can. We must wait; but it may not be that." He examined the patient again, and shook his head.

"I can always give something to keep her from suffering like this."

The leather bag at last disclosed its mysterious vials. Fifteen drops of a yellowish drug were poured into two fingers of water, which the sick woman propped up in bed swallowed with signs o acute pain, After that, apparently there was nothing but to wait further. The men lit their pipes, and the doctor with his feet against the stove told of his skill and of his cures.

"A malady like this," said he, "which one does not recognize clearly is more trying for a doctor than a serious case. Now, pneumonia, or even typhoid fever,—three quarters of the people around here, unless they die of old age, these are the diseases that finish them. Very well; typhoid fever and pneumonia—I cure them every month. You remember Viateur Tremblay, the postmaster of St. Henri.

He appeared a little offended that Madame Chapdelaine was stricken with an obscure disease

difficult to diagnose, and not with one of the two affections he treated with the most success, and he described minutely how he cured the postmaster of St. Henri. From that they went on to discuss all the news of the county, news that makes the circuit of Lake St. John, carried from house to house, and is a thousand times more passionately interesting than news of famines or of war, since those who converse always connect the news with some one of their friends or relations, in that country where every bond of kinship is followed in the mind with meticulous precision in spite of the great distances.

The mother Chapdelaine stopped moaning, and appeared to have fallen asleep, Accordingly, the doctor having decided that he had done all that was expected of him for one evening at least, emptied his pipe, and stood up.

"I am going to sleep at Honfleur," he said. "Your horse is fit to take me that far? You need not come yourself, I know the road. I shall pass the night with Ephrem Surprenant, and come back to-morrow before midday."

Chapdelaine hesitated for some time, as he reflected that his old horse had already completed a hard journey; but he made no objection, and went out to harness once more. A few minutes later the man of science took his departure, and the family found themselves alone as usual.

A great quiet filled the house. Each one thought contentedly, "It is a good remedy he has given her, anyhow. She does not complain any more." But an hour had hardly passed before the sick woman emerged from the torpor in which she had been cast by the too feeble narcotic, attempted to turn over, and uttered a cry of pain. All the family got up once more, and in their distress ranged themselves beside the bed. She opened her eyes, and after several keen complaints broke out with noisy crying:

"Samuel, it is certain I am going to die."

"No, no; not at all. Keep such ideas out of your mind."

"But yes. I tell you I am going to die. I feel it, and this doctor is only a great fool that does not know what to do. He cannot even tell what the sickness is, and the medicine he gave me is no good, and has not cured me. I tell you I am going to die."

She spoke in a failing voice interrupted by moans, and the tears ran down her heavy cheeks. Her husband and children were utterly cast down, as they looked at her. The fear of death pervaded the house. They felt themselves isolated from the rest of the world, without defence, having no longer even a horse to go in search of far away succour; and their eyes were wet although they remained silent and still, appalled as if by an act of treachery. In the meantime Eutrope Gagnon arrived.

"And I expected to find her much better," he exclaimed. "That doctor there: what about him?" Chapdelaine beside himself, cried out:

"This doctor is good for nothing, and I shall tell him so. He came here; he gave her a little medicine, worth nothing, in the bottom of a cup, and he has gone to sleep in the village, as if he had earned his pay. He has done nothing but tire my horse; but he will not have a cent from me, nothing at all, not a cent." Eutrope shook his head and declared solemnly:

"I have not the least faith in doctors, either. If we had only thought of going for a bone-setter like Tit'Sèbe from St. Félicien..." All faces turned to him, and the tears stopped.

"Tit'Sèbe," said Maria. "You think he is good in such cases as this?" Eutrope and Chapdelaine affirmed their confidence at the same moment:

"Tit'Sèbe cures people; that is well known. He has not passed through the schools; but he cures people, You have surely heard of Nazaire Gaudreau, who fell from the top of a building, and broke his back. The doctors came to see him. They knew nothing, except to tell him the Latin name of his trouble, and that he was going to die. Then they went for Tit'Sèbe, and he cured him." They all knew the practitioner by reputation, and hope was born again.

"Tit'Sèbe is a good man; he cures people. For all that, he is not difficult about money. You go for him; you pay for his time, and he cures

you. He is the one that healed little Roméo Boily after he had been crushed by a wagon loaded with planks." The sick woman had fallen into a kind of stupor and groaned feebly, but her eyes were closed.

"I will go and fetch him, if you like," Eutrope suggested.

"But with what horse now?" Maria asked. "The doctor has taken Charles-Eugène to Honfleur." Chapdelaine made a gesture of rage, and muttered between his teeth: "The old rascal."

Eutrope reflected for a moment, and announced his decision: "That is nothing. I will go, all the same. I shall walk as far as Honfleur, and there I shall very soon find some one to lend me a horse and sleigh,— Racicot or even old Néron."

"It is thirty-five miles from here to St Félicien, and the roads are bad."

"I will go, all the same."

He set out at once, and ran upon the snow, thinking of the grateful look in Maria's eyes. The rest of the family made preparations for the night, turning over in their minds one more calculation of distance,— seventy miles going and coming; and the bad roads. The lamp was left lit, and until morning the sick woman bemoaned herself in the silence, now in acute complaint, and again in feeble sighs.

Two hours after dawn the doctor and the Curé from St. Henri arrived in company. "I could not

come sooner," the priest explained. "But here I am, all the same, and I have brought the doctor on the way. They sat down beside the bed, and talked in a low voice. The doctor proceeded to a new examination, but it was the Curé who announced the result: "There is nothing to be said. She does not appear to be worse, but this is no common sickness. I am going to hear her confession, and give absolution; after that both of us will go away, and return the day after to-morrow."

He approached the bed once more, whilst all the others took their seats by the window. For several minutes the two voices were heard in response, the one weakened by suffering and arrested by groans, the other confident, serious, and scarcely lowered for the solemn questions. After an indistinct murmur, august proceedings hovered over the household, making all heads to bow. The priest arose.

Before his departure the doctor confided to Maria a little vial with certain directions: "only if she suffers so severely that she cries out, and never more than fifteen drops at a time; and give her no cold water to drink." She lead them to the door, the vial in her hand. As he was about to climb into the sleigh the Curé of St. Henri took her aside, and in his turn spoke a few words to her.

"The doctors do what they can," he said quietly, "but there is none save God who understands disease. Pray earnestly, and I will say a mass for

her to-morrow; yes, a high mass with music,—that is understood.

All day Maria strove to combat with prayers the mysterious progress of the disease; each time she approached the bed it was with the confused hope that a miracle had been performed, and that the patient would presently cease from groaning, sleep for several hours, and wake up completely well. There was nothing of the kind. The sounds of suffering continued. Towards evening they were hushed into a sort of deep sigh, repeated incessantly, and seeming to protest against a heavy burden, or as it were against the slow invasion of a deadly poison.

In the middle of the night Eutrope Gagnon arrived, bringing with him Tit'Sèbe, the bone-setter. He was a small, thin man with a sad face and very gentle eyes. As at all times when summoned to the bedside of a sick person, he had arrayed himself in his ceremonial garments of black cloth which had served him well, and he wore them with the awkwardness of peasants dressed in their Sunday clothes. But the strong brown hands emerging from his sleeves had those movements which imposed confidence. They palpated the limbs and body of the mother Chapdelaine with infinite delicacy, without eliciting from her a single cry of pain; after that for a long time he sat still by the bedside, contemplating her as if he expected a miraculous intuition to come to him.

But when he spoke, it was only to say: "You have called the Curé for her? He has been here.—And when is he to return? To-morrow; that is right." After a fresh silence he awoked frankly:

"I can do nothing for her. It is a sickness in the inside of the body, which I do not understand. If it had been an accident, bones broken, I should have cured her. I should have had nothing to do but feel her bones with my hands, and then the good God would have revealed to me what to do, and I should have cured her. But there; it is a malady I do not understand. I could, of course, put a fly-plaster on her back, and perhaps that would draw away the blood, and so relieve her for a time; or indeed I could give her a drink made from the kidney of the beaver; it is good in such cases, – that is well known. But I do not think that would cure her,— neither the drink nor the fly-plaster.

He spoke with such honesty and so simply that he made them feel what the sickness of a human body really is,— a phenomenon mysterious and dread, going on behind closed doors, which other human beings can only combat by a clumsy groping, in reliance upon signs that are uncertain.

"If the good God so wills, she is going to die."

Maria began to weep softly; the father remained mute and motionless, his mouth open; he did not yet understand. The bone-setter having pronounced his verdict bowed his head, and for a long

TIT'SÈBE

time looked upon the sick woman with compassionate eyes. His brown peasant hands, helpless, rested on his knees. With bowed shoulders, leaning slightly forward, gentle and sad, he seemed to be carrying on with his Maker an unspoken dialogue:

"Thou hast given unto me the gift of healing broken bones, and I have healed them; but Thou hast not given to me the gift of curing ills like these. So then, I must leave this poor woman to die."

For the first time the deep marks which illness had graven on the visage of the mother Chapdelaine appeared to her husband and to her children to be quite other than passing signs of pain. It was the definite imprint of the dissolution which was at hand. The deep gasps—and in truth they were of the nature of râles—which emerged from her bosom were now no longer a conscious expression of suffering, but the last instinctive protest of an organism which the approach of death was about to destroy. A new fear came to them, almost stronger than their fear of losing her.

"You do not think she is going to die before the Curé returns?" Maria asked.

Tit'Sèbe made a gesture of ignorance. "I cannot tell.—If your horse is not too tired, you might do well to go for him as soon as it is daylight."

All eyes were turned towards the window, which was nothing more than a black patch, and then towards the sick woman again. A woman, strong

and brave, who had all her health and intelligence five days ago, surely she was not going to die as quickly as that. But now that they knew the sad and inevitable issue, each glance discovered a subtle change, some new sign which made this prostrate woman, blind and groaning, a creature entirely different from the wife and mother whom they had so long known.

Half an hour passed. Chapdelaine arose quickly after another look towards the window. "I am going to harness," he said.

Tit'Sèbe nodded his head. "That is right; you might as well harness; daylight is coming. At that, the Curé will be here by noon."

"Yes, I am going to harness," repeated Chapdelaine.

But at the instant of departure he seemed suddenly to recognize that he was preparing to fulfil a sad and solemn mission in going for the Blessed Sacrament, which is an announcement of death; and he hesitated a little as one about to take an irremediable step.

"I am going to harness." He balanced himself upon one foot after the other, cast one last look upon the sick woman, and finally went out. Day came. Very soon the wind rose, and began to rage around the house.

"That is the north-west wind taking hold; there is going to be a storm," said Tit'Sèbe.

Maria turned her eyes towards the window, and

sighed: "And just two days since it snowed; it is going to drift for certain. The roads were bad enough before. Father and the Curé are going to have a hard time."

The bone-setter shook his head. "Perhaps they will have a little hardship on the way, but they will arrive all the same. A priest who carries the Blessed Sacrament—he is strong." His mild eyes were filled with a boundless faith.

"He is strong—a priest who carries the Blessed Sacrament," he repeated. "Three years ago they sent for me to care for a sick man down the river Mistassini. I saw quick enough that I could not cure him; then I told them that they should go and fetch the priest. It was night, and there were no men in the house, seeing that it was the father himself who was sick and all the boys were small. So I went myself. The river had to be crossed on the way back; the ice had just come down—it was the springtime — and there was hardly a boat in the water. We found a heavy craft which had lain in the sand all winter, and when we tried to put it into the water, it was so sunk in the sand and so heavy that with four men we could scarcely move it. There was on the spot Simon Martel, big Lalancette of St. Méthode, another man I cannot call to mind, and myself. The four of us, thinking of that poor man who was by way of dying, like a pagan, on the other side of the water, hauled and pushed as if we would break

our hearts, and yet we could not manage to move that boat a quarter of an inch. Very well; the Curé came; he put his hand on the gunwale — nothing more than put his hand upon the gunwale... : 'Shove once more'—that is what he said; and the boat started off as if by itself, and went towards the water almost like a living creature. This man who was sick received the Blessed Sacrament as he should, and he died like a gentleman, just as the day was breaking. Yes, he is strong—a priest."

Maria sighed once more, but in the certainty and imminence of death her heart had found a measure of sad serenity. The obscure disease, the distress over the outcome, these were things to be fought against with blind strivings, and not completely understood; things vague and terrifying as phantoms. But in face of inevitable and imminent death, all that remained to be done was quite simple and provided for ages ago by infallible laws. The Curé came whether it was day or night; he came from far away carrying the Blessed Sacrament, across the torrential rivers of springtime, over the treacherous ice, by the wretched roads filled with snow, in face of the cruel north-west wind; he came without ever failing, escorted by miracles; he performed the sacred rites, and after that there was no longer place for doubt or fear. Death became a splendid promotion, an open door to the unimaginable beatitude of the elect...

The storm had risen, and the partitions of the house shook as the panes of a window rattle in a gale. The north-west wind came raging over the tops of the somber woods. On the cleared and exposed space which surrounded the little wooden buildings—the house, the stable, and the barn—it beat and swirled for several moments, violent, fierce, with quick squalls, that strove to lift the roofs, and smote the walls as with strokes of a battering-ram, before retreating to the forest in a passion of spite.

The wooden house shook from ground to chimney-top, and seemed to sway on its foundation, so that the inmates, hearing the rage and strident clamour of the enemy, feeling all around them the tumult of the shock, suffered in reality all the horror of the storm, not having that impression of safe retreat which is given by strong houses of stone.

Tit'Sèbe looked about him: "It is a good house you have here, staunch and warm. It was your father and the boys that built it? Yes. And, what is more, you must have a pretty large piece of land cleared by this time."

The wind was so strong they did not hear the bells of the sleigh. Suddenly, the door burst open against the wall, and the Curé of St. Henri came in, carrying the Blessed Sacrament in his two uplifted hands. Maria and Tit'Sèbe knelt down; Tit'Bé ran to shut the door, and then went on his

knees. The priest laid off his heavy fur cloak, of which the hood, powdered with snow, came down to his eyes, and he went towards the sick-bed without losing an instant, as a messenger of grace. Oh, the certitude, the satisfaction of a divine promise that dissipates the fearful mists of death! Whilst the priest performed the sacred rites, and the murmur of his voice mingled with the sighs of the dying, Samuel Chapdelaine and his children prayed without raising their heads, almost consoled, freed from doubt and distress, in the surety that what was passing before them was a covenant concluded with the divine power, which made of the blue heavens, sown with stars of gold, a legitimate possession.

After this the Curé of St. Henri warmed himself at the stove; then they passed some further time together in prayer, kneeling down beside the bed.

About four o'clock the wind shifted to the south-east; the storm ceased as suddenly as a wave that breaks upon a sea wall; and in the great unwonted silence which followed the tumult the mother Chapdelaine sighed twice, and died.

XV

Ephrem Surprenant pushed open the door, and appeared upon the threshold.

"I have come..."

He found no other words; but stood embarrassed for a moment, looking from one to the other,—Chapdelaine, Maria, the children seated by the table, rigid and silent. Then he pulled off his cap by a quick movement, as if to make amends for something forgotten, shut the door behind him, and approached the bed whereon the body lay.

They had changed the position of the bed, turning the head to the wall and the foot inwards, so that it might be accessible from both sides. Near the wall two candles were burning on chairs; one of them was fixed in a large candlestick of white metal, that the visitors of the Chapdelaine family had never seen before; for the the other Maria could find nothing more suitable than a glass bowl in which blueberries and wild raspberries were served on festal days in summer.

The metal candlestick gleamed; the glass bowl glistened in the light which, however, but faintly

illumined the face of the dead. That face had assumed a singular pallor, refined as a town-bred woman's, the effect of several days' illness, or due to the cold distinction of the dead. Chapdelaine and his children were at first somewhat surprised, and then they discovered a stately metamorphosis which showed how greatly death had already raised her high above them.

Ephrem Surprenant looked on for a moment, then knelt down. At first he only muttered some indistinct words of prayer; but when Maria and Tit'Bé came to kneel down beside him, he drew from his pocket his *chapelet* of large beads, and began to say them over in a low voice.

When this was finished, he went and sat down on a chair near the table, and remained silent for some time, now and then sadly shaking his head, as is proper in a house of mourning, and also because he was sincerely grieved.

"It is a great loss," he said at last. "You were well provided with a wife, Samuel; no one can say to the contrary. You were well provided with a wife, that is certain." After saying this he was silent again, seeking without finding words of consolation, and ended by speaking of something else.

"The weather is mild this evening; it will soon rain. Every one says it will be an early spring."

For peasants, all that touches the earth which nourishes them, as well as the seasons which in

turn send to sleep, and awaken, the earth, is so important that one may speak of it without dishonour even in the presence of death. They instinctively turned their eyes towards the little square window; but the night was dark, and they could see nothing.

Ephrem Surprenant began anew the eulogy of the dead. "In the whole parish there was not a more valiant or useful woman; and hospitable too; what a splendid way she had with guests. In the old parishes, and even in towns where the trains run, you would not have found many to surpass her. Yes, you were well equipped with such a wife." He arose presently, and went away very sad. In the long silence that followed the father Chapdelaine allowed his head gradually to sink on his breast, and seemed to fall asleep. Maria raised her voice, fearing some disrespect:

"Do not fall asleep, father."

"No, no."

He straightened himself on his chair, and squared his shoulders; but as his eyes closed in spite of him, he quickly left his seat.

"We might as well say another *chapelet*," said he. They knelt down beside the bed on which the body lay, and recited a whole *chapelet*. When they arose, they heard the rain whipping the window panes and the shingles on the roof. It was the first rain of the spring, and it announced deliv-

erance: winter ended, the earth about to reappear, the rivers resuming their joyous march, the world transformed once more, like a beautiful creature whom the touch of a magic wand delivers from some malignant spell. But they did not dare to rejoice in it — in this household weighted down by death—, and truly they experienced little joy, because their grief was profound and sincere.

They opened the window and sat down again, listening to the rattle of the raindrops falling on the roof. Maria saw that her father had turned away his head and was still. She believed his habitual drowsiness had overcome him once more; but at the moment when she was about to awaken him with a word, it was he who sighed and began to speak:

"Eprem Surprenant told the truth," he said. "Your mother was a good woman, Maria, a woman without an equal." Maria indicated assent with her head, but kept her lips closed.

"Brave and a good counsellor, she was that as long as she lived; but it was, above all, in the early days, just after our marriage, and a little later when Esdras and you were yet children, that she showed how rare was her quality. The wife of a small farmer expects, of course, to have discomfort; but women who come to their tasks as capably and with so good a temper as she did in those days,—there are not many of them, Maria."

Maria murmured: "I know, father; I know very well," and she wiped her eyes, for her heart was breaking.

"When we took our first farm at Normandin, we had two cows and not much pasture, for nearly all that section was the standing forest and difficult to reclaim. For myself, I took my ax, and said to her, 'I am going to make a farm for you, Laura.' From morning till evening, it was chop, chop, without coming to the house except for dinner; and all this time she did the housework and the cooking; she tended the cattle, she put the fences in order, she cleaned the stable, toiled without ceasing; and three and four times a day she went out before the door and stood a moment, gazing upon me down there at the edge of the woods, where I was striking out with all my strength upon the spruce and birch to make a farm for her.

"And there was that time in July when the well went dry. The cows had no water to quench their thirst, and they as good as stopped giving milk. So while I was in the woods your mother set to work, travelling to the river with a pail in each hand, climbing the bank eight and ten times in succession with full pails, her feet in the sliding sand, until she had finished filling a barrel; and when the barrel was full, she loaded it on a barrow, went and emptied it into the big tub in the pasture, more than three hundred yards from the

MADAME CHAPDELAINE

house at the foot of the ridge. This was no work fit for a woman, and I would be telling her to let me do it, but she always said, 'Do not trouble yourself about that... Do not trouble about anything... Make me a farm.' Then she would laugh to encourage me; but I saw well enough that she had been distressed, and that under her eyes was all black with fatigue.

"Then I took my ax, and I went into the woods, and I struck so hard on the birches that I made chips fly the size of my fist, whilst I said to myself, that it was a matchless woman I had there, and if the good God should guard my health, I would make a fine farm for her."

And ever the rain rattled upon the roof. From time to time a gust of wind would whip the window with heavy drops which then flowed down the glass like slow tears. A few more hours of rain, and the soil would be laid naked, rills running on every hillside; a few days, and the falls would be heard again.

"When we took another farm above Mistassini," Samuel Chapdelaine resumed, "it was the same thing; hard work and trouble for her as well as for myself; but she was always full of courage and good humour. There we were, in the deep woods, but as there were clearings with blue-grass among the rocks, we undertook to raise sheep. One evening..."

He fell silent again for a few moments; then he resumed his theme, looking fixedly upon Maria, as if he wished to make her fully understand what he was about to say.

"It was in September, at the time when all the beasts in the woods are fierce. A man from Mistassini, who was coming down the river in a canoe, stopped near our house, and this is what he said to us, 'Take care of your sheep; the bears have just killed a heifer quite near the settlement last week.' So your mother and I went that evening to search the blue-grass, to bring home the sheep to the fold for the night, so that the bears would not eat them.

"I had gone by one side, and she by another, for the reason that the sheep were scattered among the alders. It was at dusk, and all at once I heard Laura cry, 'Oh, the rascals!' There were some beasts stirring about in the bush, and it was easy to see that they were not sheep, because towards evening the sheep show like patches of white in the woods. Then I began to run as hard as I could, my ax in my hand. Your mother told me about it later on, when we were returning to the house. She had seen a sheep lying on the ground already dead. and two bears about to eat it. It takes a good man, afraid of nothing, to make a stand against bears in September, even with a gun; and when it is a woman with nothing in her hand, the best she can do is to run off, and no one has a word to say. But your mother

picked up a stick from the ground, and ran right at the bears, shouting, 'Our fine fat sheep. Clear out you big thieves, or I will do you harm.'

"I reached the spot, running as fast as I could through the stumps; by the time I rejoined her the bears had fled into the woods without saying a thing, quite pitiable, because she had scared them so."

Maria listened, holding her breath, and asking herself if it was really her mother who had done that, her mother whom she had always known as gentle and patient, who had never given Télesphore a slap, without immediately taking him on her knee to console him, weeping with him, and saying that to beat a child was enough to break one's heart.

The swift spring shower was over; the moon showed through the clouds, coming like a face curious to see how much yet remained of the winter's snow after this first rain. The earth was everywhere of a uniform whiteness; the profound silence of the night announced that days enough would still go by before was heard anew the far-away thunder of the great falls; but the warm breeze whispered encouragement and promise.

Samuel Chapdelaine was silent for a time, his head bowed, his hands on his knees, meditating upon the past and the years hard yet full of hope. When he began to speak again, it was in a hesitating voice with a kind of melancholy self-abasement.

"At Normandin, and at Mistassini, and in the other places where we lived, I always worked hard; no one can deny that. I have cleared many an acre of woodland, built houses and barns, saying to myself every time, that a day would come when we would have a fine farm, where your mother could live like the women of the old parishes, with lovely cleared fields on both sides of the house as far as you could see, a vegetable garden, fine fat cows in the yard... And there she is dead after all in this half savage place, far from other houses and churches, and so close to the woods that there are nights when you can hear the foxes cry. And it is all my fault that she is dead in such a place; it is all my fault." Remorse laid hold upon him; he shook his head, his eyes on the ground.

"Several times, after we passed five or six years in one place, and everything had gone well, we began to have a good property,— pasture, large plots of ground ready for seeding, a house all papered inside with illustrated papers... People came and settled around us. There was nothing to do but wait a little, working quietly, and we should have found ourselves in the midst of a fine parish where Laura would have had a happy reign... And all at once my heart failed me. I felt myself irritated with my work, irritated with the country. I began to hate the faces of the people who took up sections in the neigbourhood and came to see

us, thinking that we should be pleased to have visitors after being so long alone. I heard it said that further towards the head of the Lake, in the woods, there was good land, that people from St. Gédéon talked of taking up sections in that region; and there was the place I had heard about but had never seen, where there was not yet a single person. I began to hunger and thirst for it, as if it were the spot where I was born...

"In those times, when the work of the day was done, instead of sitting smoking by the fire, I would go out and sit on the door-step, and stay there without stirring, like a man homesick and bored; and all I saw there before me: the property I had created with my own hands, with so much pain and labour, the fields, the fences, the ridge that closed the view,—I hated it, as if I were going mad.

"Then your mother would come up behind me without a sound. She too looked upon our property, and I knew that from the bottom of her heart she was content, because it was beginning to look like the old parishes, where she had been brought up, where she would have wished to spend all her life. But instead of saying to me that I was nothing but a simple old fool for wanting to go away, as many a woman would have done, and casting about for reproaches upon my folly, she did nothing but sigh gently, thinking of the misery that was to begin all over again in another place

in the woods; and she said to me as gently as possible, 'Well, well, Samuel; so it comes to this: we shall soon be on the move again?'

"At such times I could make no reply to her, I was so choked with shame on account of the hard life she spent with me; but I knew well enough that I would finish by setting out once more, to journey still farther north, farther into the woods, and that she would come with me, and take her share in the hard toil of the pioneer, always as capable as ever, brave and good humoured, with never a word of reproach or ill-will."

After that he fell silent, and seemed slowly to chew the cud of his regret and grief. Maria sighed, and passed her hands over her face as one does, who wishes to efface or forget; but in reality she wished to forget nothing. What she had just heard had moved and troubled her; she had the confused intuition that this recital of a hard life, bravely lived, had for her a profound and opportune meaning, and that it contained a lesson, if only she were able to grasp it.

"How ill we understand others!" she thought.

Since crossing the threshold of death, her mother seemed to have taken on a character unique and majestic, so that the familiar and humble qualities which made her beloved in her lifetime vanished behind other virtues that were almost heroic.

To live all her life in the desolate places, when she would have liked the company of other human

beings and the peaceful security of the towns, oppressed from dawn to night, spending all the strength of her body in a thousand hard tasks, and retaining from dawn to night all her patience and a joyous serenity; never seeing about her anything save nature, primitive and savage, the inhuman woods; and preserving in the midst of that an ordered way of life, the sweetness and the gaiety which are the fruit of centuries of life without toil,— surely this was an attainment difficult to accomplish, and full of merit. And what was the reward? A few words of praise after death had come.

Was it worth the trouble? The question did not propound itself in her mind with such precision, but that is what she really thought. To live thus, so hardily, so bravely, and to leave behind so much regret,— few women were capable of that. For herself...

The sky bathed in moonlight was singularly luminous and deep; from one side of the horizon to the other clouds, curiously carved into scenic effects, filed past in solemn procession. The white ground did not evoke the idea of cold or of sadness, for the breeze was warm, and some mysterious virtue of the coming spring made of the snow merely a disguise for the features of the earth, in no way formidable to one who foresaw that it must soon vanish.

Maria, seated by the little window, gazed upon the sky, the white ground, the distant barrier of the forest, without giving any thought to the scene; and all at once it seemed to her that the question she had put to herself was about to receive a reply. To live in this land as her mother had lived, then to die, and leave behind her a grieving husband and the memory of the essential virtues of her race,— she felt that she would be capable of that. She took account of herself without vanity, and as if the answer had come from a source outside of herself. Yes, she would be capable of that, and a kind of wonder came, as if there had dawned upon her a new and unexpected revelation.

She could so live; only she had no intention of doing it. A little later, when this mourning was at an end, Lorenzo Surprenant would return from the States for the third time, and would entice her towards the unknown magic of the towns, far from the great woods which she abhorred, far from the barbarous country where men who lost their way died without succour, where women suffered and agonized interminably whilst one went to look for ineffectual aid along the endless roads filled with snow. Why stay there, and toil so, and suffer so, when one can go away to the south, and live at ease?

The soft wind that announced the spring smote upon the window, bearing with it confused oises: the murmur of close set-trees, whose

branches swayed and rubbed against one other, the distant cry of an owl. Then the solemn silence reigned anew. Samuel Chapdelaine had fallen asleep; but his sleep by the death-bed had in it nothing of coarseness or disrespect; his chin on his breast, his hands open on his knees, he seemed plunged in utter dejection, or indeed sunk into a condition of voluntary half death, where he followed a little nearer to the departed one.

Maria asked herself once more: Why remain there, and toil so hard, and suffer so much? Why?... And as she found no answer, at length it came to pass that certain voices were lifted up from the silence of the night.

They had nothing of the miraculous, those voices. Each one of us hears such voices, when we are by ourselves and far enough withdrawn to leave behind the sordid tumult of the daily life. Only they speak louder, and clearer, to simple hearts in the midst of the great woods of the north, and in the desolate places. As Maria thought of the distant marvels of the cities, the first voice came to her, recalling in whispers the blessings, manifold but ignored, of the country from which she was willing to escape:

The apparition, half miraculous, of the earth in the springtime, after the long months of winter, the formidable snow melting into frolicksome streams on every hillside; the heaving roots, then the moss still swoln with water, and soon the

delivered earth, on which one walks with glances of delight and gasps of mirth, as in an exquisite convalescence...

A little later the budding of the birches, the alders, and the aspens, the laurel covered with pink flowers; and after the enforced idleness of the winter the hard work on the land—almost a holiday; to toil from morning to night a blessed favour...

The cattle at length released from the stable rushed into the pastures and gorged themselves with new grass. All the creatures of the year the calves, the young fowl, the lambs, romped in the sun, and grew from day to day like the grass and the barley. The poorest one of the farmers sometimes stopped in the midst of his yard or his fields, his hands in his pockets, and savoured the high contentment of knowing that the heat of the sun, the warmth of the rain, the generous alchemy of the earth—all kinds of mighty forces—worked as submissive slaves for him—for him...

After that it was the summer time; the splendour of dazzling noons, the uprush of burning air that made the horizon and the line of the woods to quiver, the flies whirling in the light, and at three hundred paces from the house the rapids and the fall — white foam on black water,— the sight of it alone sent out a delicious freshness.

Then the harvest, the life-giving grain piling up in the barns; the autumn; and soon the winter.

come again. But here was the wonderful thing; the winter no longer appeared either hateful or terrible. It brought, at least, the intimacy of the shuttered house; and out of doors, with the monotony and silence of the drifted snow, peace, a great peace...

In the cities there would be the marvels of which Lorenzo Surprenant had spoken, and those other marvels which she herself confusedly imagined: the broad and brilliant streets, the splendid shops, the facile existence almost without labour, and filled with little pleasures... But perhaps in the end one would grow tired of this frivolous life, and of an evening one would desire nothing but rest and tranquillity, or to find again the quietude of field and wood, the caress of the first fresh breeze coming from the north-west after the setting of the sun, and the infinite peace of the land, wholly asleep in the silence.

"Yet it must be splendid," she said to herself, as she thought of the great American cities. Another voice raised itself in reply. Down there it was a foreign land; people of another race, speaking other things in another tongue, singing other songs... Here...

All the names of her country, those she heard every day and those she had heard but once, awoke in her memory the innumerable names which the pious peasants, come from France, gave to the lakes, to the rivers, to the villages, of the

new country they had discovered, and in some measure had peopled — Lac à l'Eau Claire... la Famine ... Saint-Cœur-de-Marie ... Trois-Pistoles... Sainte-Rose-du-Dégel... Pointe-aux-Outardes... Saint-André-de-l'Epouvante...

Eutrope Gagnon had an uncle who lived at Saint-André-de-l'Epouvante. Racicot of Honfleur often spoke of his son who was a fireman on board a Gulf steamer, and all the time new names were being added to the old, the names of fishing villages or of little ports on the St. Lawrence, scattered along the banks between which the ships of other days had ascended boldly towards the unknown... Pointe-Mille-Vaches... Notre-Dame-du-Portage... les Grandes-Bergeronnes... Gaspé...

How pleasant it was to hear these names pronounced when one spoke of relatives or friends living in far places, or it might be on long journeys How familiar and brotherly they were, giving on every occasion a warm feeling of kinship, making each one think in repeating them: In this whole country we are at home, at home.

Towards the west, when one left the province, towards the south, when one had passed the border there were everywhere only English names which one learned in time to pronounce, and no doubt at last they seemed natural; but where find again the pleasant savour of French names?

The words of a foreign language sounding from all lips in the streets, in the shops... Little girls

holding hands, dancing round, and singing a song which one did not understand... Here...

Maria looked at her father who was all this time asleep, his chin on his breast like a broken man who meditates on death, and all at once she remembered the simple songs and ditties he used to teach to the children almost every evening:

A la claire fontaine,
M'en allant promener.

In the towns of the States, even if one taught the children these songs, surely they would very soon forget them.

The scattered clouds which a little while ago were passing across the moonlit sky were now resolved into a grey canopy, huge though thin, which barely allowed the light to filter through; the ground covered with half melted snow looked wan, and between these two luminous spaces the black line of the forest deployed like the front of an army.

Maria shivered; the tenderness that had touched her heart was now gone. She said to herself once more: All the same, it is a hard country here. Why remain?

Then a third voice more powerful than the others was lifted up in the silence, the voice of the country of Quebec, which was half a song of women and half a sermon of the priest. It came like the sound of a bell, like the majestic clamour of the organ in a church, like a tender plaint, like the

piercing and long-drawn cry by which woodsmen call to each other in the forest. For in truth, all that makes the soul of the province was contained in this voice: the dear solemnity of the old religion, the sweetness of the old language so jealously guarded. the splendour and the primitive force of a new country, where an ancient race has renewed its youth. The voice said:

"Three centuries ago we came here, and here we remain. Those who led us hither might come amongst us without disappointment and without regret, for it is true that, if we have learned little, assuredly we have forgotten nothing.

"We carried overseas our prayers and our songs; they are ever the same. We bore in our breasts the heart of our country's men, valiant and vital, as prompt to pity as to laugh, a heart the most human of all human hearts. It has not changed. We marked out a plan of the new continent, from Gaspé to Montreal, from Saint Jean d'Iberville to Ungava, saying to ourselves: Herein all those things which we have carried with us, our religion, our language, our virtues, and even our frailties, are become sacred things; and although they are intangible, they will endure even unto the end.

"Round about us strangers have come, whom we are wont to call barbarians; they have seized almost all the power; they have acquired almost all the money; but in the country of Quebec noth-

ing has changed. Nothing will change, because we are a witness. For ourselves and our destinies we have clearly apprehended this sole duty; to persist, to hold our own. And we have held our own, so that, it may be, after several centuries more, the world will turn to us and say: These people are of a race that knows not how to perish... We are a witness, a testimony.

"For this cause we must remain in the province where our fathers have remained, and live as they lived, so that we may yield obedience to that commandment, unexpressed although formed in their hearts, which has passed into our hearts, which too in our turn we must transmit to a numerous offspring: In the country of Quebec, nothing shall die, and nothing shall be changed..."

The immense grey canopy which concealed the sky had become more opaque and weighty. Suddenly the rain began to fall afresh, bringing still a little nearer the blessed epoch — the earth laid bare and the rivers set free. Samuel Chapdelaine still slept, his chin on his breast, like an old man whom the weariness of a long, hard life had suddenly stricken down. The flames of the two candles fixed in the metal candlestick and in the glass bowl flickered in the warm breeze, so that shadows danced on the visage of the dead, and the lips seemed to murmur with prayers or whisper secrets.

Maria Chapdelaine emerged from her reverie and thought: Then I am to stay here—like this!

For the voices had spoken clearly, and she felt that she was bound to obey. Remembrance of her other duties only came by degrees, after she was resigned, with a single sigh. Alma Rose was only a little child; her mother was dead, and there must be a woman in the house. But in reality it was the voices that had disclosed the way.

The rain pattered on the shingles of the roof; and nature, delighted, seeing the winter at an end, sent by the open window little whiffs of gentle air that seemed like sighs of content. Throughout the hours of the night, Maria remained immovable, her hands folded in her lap, patient and unembittered, but thinking with a touch of piteous regret of the far away marvels which she would never behold, and also with sad memories of the country where it was ordained that she should live; of the warm flame which had only caressed her heart to be withdrawn without hope of return; and of the great woods filled with snow from which too rash youths never come back again.

XVI

In the month of May Esdras and Da'Bé came down from the shanties, and their grief revived the grief of the others. But the earth was at last naked and ready for the sowing; and no sorrow could dispense with the summer's work.

Eutrope Gagnon came to spend the evening; and it may have been that a stealthy glance at Maria's face disclosed to him that her heart had changed, for when they found themselves alone he asked:

"Do you still intend to go away, Maria?"

"No," she indicated by a movement of her head, her eyes down cast.

"Then . . . I know well enough, this is not the time for speaking of such things; but if you could tell me that later on I might have a chance, it would be easier to wait." To this Maria made answer:

"Yes . . . If you wish, I will marry you, as you desire, in the springtime following this springtime, when the men return from the woods for the seeding."

THE END

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Maria Chapdelaine

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